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The purpose of this dissertation was to understand the phenomenon of shopping locally from the perspective of the consumer and the store owner and within the context of a revitalized downtown. The three objectives of this study were: (1) to explore the reasons why consumers choose to shop locally in revitalized downtowns, (2) to investigate the reasons why store owners choose to operate within the revitalized downtown, and (3) to consider the implications of shopping locally within the revitalized downtown context for the broader community. Few studies examine the significance of shopping locally and what this means for downtown revitalization. Therefore, this dissertation fills a gap in the academic literature by exploring the experiences of consumers who shop locally and local retail owners who establish businesses within the downtown.

An ethnographic approach to research was used to address the purpose of this study. Data collection methods included in-depth and field interviews, observation, digital methods and photography. A total of 9 field sites were observed within a single downtown area, including a coffee shop, a bookstore, a brewery, and boutiques. A total of 30 in-depth interviews and 49 field interviews were conducted with shoppers, store owners, and representatives from community partnership organizations. Specifically, what local shopping means for consumers and why the downtown is distinctive for local shopping was examined. For business owners, the reasons they are drawn to the downtown area and the ways in which they help to build community were explored. Data

were analyzed for similarities and differences which were then used in the development of the thematic interpretation.

Three conceptual areas surfaced and were used to structure the interpretation: *Understanding the Significance of Place*, *Understanding the Significance of People*, and *Understanding the Significance of Practices*. Within each conceptual area, the themes that emerged through the analysis of data collected for this dissertation were interpreted and the concepts important to each theme were presented. The conceptual and theoretical significance of the interpretation was then considered in relation to literature on the topic and through the lens of practice theory.

Findings indicate that local shopping is more complex than what may appear and that people who shop locally share an interest in supporting the community. Thus, local shopping can be considered an act of civic engagement. Equally, findings reveal that a sense of community can be created between shoppers and store owners and/or employees through the phenomenon of local shopping. Moreover, according to the findings of this dissertation, the place where people shop is important, in that the combination of the relationships and the unique sense of place contributes to the distinctiveness of the shopping local experience. In relation to store owners, findings indicate that civic engagement is significant not only in their reasons for owning and operating a store, but also in the camaraderie built among them. As this study reveals, the presence of retail in the downtown area is helping to reenergize a once forgotten part of the city. Shoppers and store owners alike talked about the importance of the downtown area and specifically

the buzz that emanates from downtown because of the businesses that have set up shop there.

This study is the first to consider how practice theory frames the meanings of local shopping, as it considers the reasons for and circumstances that surround local shopping and considers how the phenomenon can serve the greater good. By examining the motivations and meanings of the experience of shopping local through the lens of practice theory and the conceptual areas of place, people, and practices, it becomes clear that individuals who make the choice to shop locally are doing more than just “shopping.” Findings highlight the complex nature of local shopping through the functional, social, economic, aesthetic, and community factors involved with the practice. Although this study addresses major gaps in the literature, it also points to the need for further research into the relationships between local shopping, consumers, retail store owners and a revitalized downtown.

SHOPPING LOCALLY: AN EXPLORATION OF MOTIVATIONS AND MEANINGS
IN THE CONTEXT OF A REVITALIZED DOWNTOWN

by

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Approved by

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To my family, Adam, Ella, and Camden, and to Mom and Dad. This dissertation is dedicated to you for your constant love and support. Dad, I wish you were here to celebrate with me but know you have been there even in these last few steps.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

After decades of shopping at national big-box retailers, chain stores, and online, it appears that some consumers are once again looking locally for ways to spend their time and money. Moreover, as the marketplace has become global, some consumers are looking for opportunities to make the consumption experience more personal and in ways that have a positive impact on the communities in which they live. These consumers are sometimes referred to as *socially conscious consumers*, defined as consumers who feel strongly that they have a direct influence on the environment and consider the social impact of their consumption choices (Webster, 1975).

Shopping locally is one behavior that socially conscious consumers engage in, in an effort to exert control over what is produced and sold in the marketplace by choosing local merchants over national or global corporations. However, the ripple effects of these choices may include positive implications for the local community, especially when these consumers choose to shop within downtown areas of cities and towns across the United States. Such areas often add to the overall community by boasting the largest concentration of unique and locally-owned retail options, versus big box and chain stores, and offering distinctive amenities that set these areas apart.

Downtown shopping could be a significant factor in revitalizing the many abandoned and deteriorating central business districts located throughout the United

States. Prior to WWII, downtown areas across the country were filled with retail stores, including both major department stores as well as locally-owned shops. Shopping was more centralized, with downtowns acting as the hub of the community. After WWII, the U.S. witnessed major declines in downtown areas that were often connected to the desire for more single-family housing, as well as increases in automobile ownership and road improvements (Burayidi, 2001; Norquist, 1998). The end result was a proliferation of chain stores and the sprawl, or suburbanization, of the U.S. population, altering where and how consumers both lived and shopped (Faulk, 2006). Consequently, this change meant that downtowns suffered. More recently, efforts to revitalize vacant downtown areas have helped to spur retail development in these locations across the country (Cohen, 2007). Revitalized downtown areas offer prime locations for locally-owned retail stores, and are especially attractive as more consumers are looking to buy at locally-owned stores.

Revitalizing both residential and commercial downtown areas offer opportunities not just to shop, but to walk to work, as well as explore restaurants and entertainment options. Indeed, cities are getting creative as they reinvest in their downtowns once again (Brennan, 2013). For example, Denver, CO and Birmingham, AL are two places that have seen intense growth and regeneration in their downtown areas due to bond initiatives, “green” housing developments, and sports stadiums built in once vacant business districts and industrial corridors (Brennan, 2013). However, it is bringing people back to the downtown area that is most critical for these establishments to succeed. In the 1980s, downtown neighborhoods in Denver, CO that would have been

described as derelict and sparsely populated now command the highest real estate prices in the city (St. George, 2016). This significant turnaround is one example of the positive, far-reaching effects of downtown revitalization and the importance of community involvement and support for businesses, including retail shops, in these areas (Heilman, 2013). A two-fold goal of this dissertation is to explore what prompts retailers to establish shops downtown and what prompts consumers to patronize them. Understanding those motives will help those involved in the process of downtown revitalization to better tailor their offerings to appeal to consumers and business owners.

Locally-owned retailers benefit the community in a number of ways. First, they offer functional benefits to residents living in downtown areas by providing an outlet to obtain many basic necessities, such as food and clothing, and within close proximity to home. Second, including boutiques and service providers in one particular area within the city is an appealing benefit for both residents and visitors alike (Chalmers, Gessner, Venteroni, & Weiler, 2011). Third, locally-owned retailers are differentiated from mass-merchants in a number of ways, not just in terms of location. Namely, merchandise selection, management policies, and store policies are decided at the store level rather than by a corporate entity. Fourth, locally-owned stores assist in job creation, which benefits the community from both an employment and tax base perspective. Last, product mix is often unique, as small, local shops tend to offer something different in terms of merchandise and even provide a more personalized experience for customers (Why Buy Local, n.d.). Locally-owned stores are not only differentiated by their local ownership and more unique offerings, but many become local landmarks, providing more

than just an outlet to purchase products. For example, according to Miller (1999), locally-owned bookstores are often considered to be “not just any retail establishment, but a vital community institution” (p. 386).

The benefits of locally-owned stores are clear, especially for consumers who are looking for unique products and different shopping experiences. Yet few studies have examined the phenomenon of locally-owned retail offerings and the reasons consumers support them. Consequently, little is known about locally-owned retail stores, or their role in downtown areas that have already been revitalized or are in the process of revitalization. With recent trends pointing to a continued interest in downtown revitalization and real estate booms occurring in such areas (Frizell, 2014), it is likely that retailers will have an important part to play, and could become landmarks once again in downtown areas across America. Thus, an additional goal of this dissertation is to investigate the extent to which store owners and their customers support the broader community by participating in the revitalization of a downtown area.

Background

In this section, relevant background information on the topics pertinent to the notion of “shopping locally” is provided. First, a brief history of downtowns and local shopping is outlined. Second, consumption and civic engagement are examined for their relevance to the concept of shopping locally. Third, the types of consumers that the literature has identified as being inclined to support locally-owned establishments within downtown areas are discussed.

Downtowns and the Evolution of Local Shopping

According to Walker (2015), a downtown is “the densest and most walkable part of any city” (p. 1). Merriam-Webster (2009) suggests that a downtown is located in the lower part of the business center of a city, the area may also be referred to as the “central business district.” For the purposes of this dissertation, the term “downtown” is used relative to cities and urban contexts within the United States.

Downtown districts across the United States were the primary places where retail and service providers established shops in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Hernandez & Jones, 2005). As mentioned earlier, this began to change after the Second World War, as families moved further away from downtown areas due to access to better roads and inexpensive automobiles. Retailers followed suit by vacating downtown locations and opening up storefronts in decentralized locations, following the sprawl of the population (Padilla & Eastlick, 2009). These suburban shopping areas offered a distinctly different look and feel from downtown areas, and frequently had the benefit of unified management and marketing efforts encouraging consumers to spend time and money (Gratz & Mintz, 1998). The creation of suburbs and the development of shopping malls in and around suburban populations meant that consumers were finding fewer reasons to leave the comfort of such areas to venture downtown. As a result of these changes, many downtown areas across the United States have experienced decades of abandonment.

Yet, in spite of years of deterioration, a downtown can be an integral part of a city, and one with the potential to bring the community together. As Glaeser, Gottlieb, and Tobio (2012) posit, downtown areas are “the best hope for the future” (p. 92), while

providing windows to the past with respect to the heritage of cities and surrounding communities. Not only can a downtown offer historic insight into a city, but it can also provide a wide range of reasons for people to visit. For example, a downtown area may include activities such as shopping, restaurants, nightlife, employment, and entertainment as well as being the seat of government for the region (Robertson, 1999). Conversely, offering an extensive range of activities assists in keeping the downtown area active and full of life both day and night. Moreover, a constant presence of people who are engaged in activities downtown helps to promote the area for those who have a vested interest in its success (Robertson, 1999).

Recent trends reveal numerous examples of the growth and revitalization occurring in downtown areas across the U.S. For example, private sector employers are relocating their offices to more “walkable” downtown locations. Cities are using these central areas to establish higher education options, such as Arizona State investing in a new campus in the heart of Phoenix. Previously ignored waterways in cities like Grand Rapids, MI and Bend, OR are also bringing new life to downtown areas through revitalization (Karras, 2016).

Not only are cities and businesses expanding their operations to downtown areas, but populations living in downtowns have also grown since the 1990s (Birch, 2002). Indeed, housing is often seen as a necessary first step toward supporting retail, simply because housing provides a population base that is present both day and night. That is, the presence of residents increases activity beyond business hours (Faulk, 2006) and allows for more viable retail and service options as compared to downtown areas that are

abandoned after business hours. Indeed, according to Karra's (2016) analysis of the *U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program* from 2000 to 2010, 75 out of the 100 largest cities in the U.S. saw an increase in residents moving to their downtowns, and growth of downtown residential options appear to be accelerating. The increase in populations residing in downtown areas enables retailers to garner more consistent support and success for their operations. Consumers who support their downtown retailers and care about the future of their communities are essential for successful and thriving downtown areas, as they are the ones who are likely to take pride in these areas (Robertson, 1999).

Evans (2011) described the future of retailing as resembling the past, and that essentially, former retail formats, such as downtown shopping areas that faded away and were replaced with suburban options, are now reinventing themselves and drawing people back once more. As I examine in this dissertation, understanding the reasons for shopping locally requires understanding what motivates individuals to live, work, and shop in revitalized downtowns.

Civic Engagement and Revitalized Downtowns

The concept of civic engagement has been used to describe a variety of actions that benefit a community. Numerous definitions of the term *civic engagement* exist, and the meaning of the term is often determined by context. For the purposes of this dissertation, the concept of civic engagement refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the lives of their communities, in order to shape these communities and improve conditions for others within them (Adler & Goggin, 2005).

With the revitalization of downtowns across the U.S. comes greater marketplace opportunities. When retailers set up shop in a downtown, they may be doing more than just satisfying consumer needs or offering unique shopping opportunities, and even more than just creating attractive downtown areas. Research indicates that retail patronage can extend beyond fulfilling utilitarian and hedonic needs by providing a connection to one's community (Chalmers, Gessner, Venturoni, & Weiler, 2012). As Chalmers et al. (2012) suggest, retailers may actually provide "links that reinforce the social fabric of a community" (p. 108). Civic engagement is frequently considered a necessary component for successful downtown revitalization.

When linked to consumption, civic engagement has been proven to be a vital aspect for the revitalization of downtowns. However, there are two requirements for this to work successfully: (1) locally-owned businesses must be engaged with the community by acting as more than providers of products and services, and (2) consumers must be engaged in supporting such ventures. Cohen (2007) provides one example of the link retail offers between the community and the revitalization efforts of a downtown area in Boston, where department stores served as central sites for revitalization efforts after WWII. Department stores acted as central hubs for the city where mass transit converged, jobs were found, and, in turn, retail stores became landmarks (Cohen, 2007). In this case, retailers did more than simply fulfill consumer needs, they served as organizing sites for further development efforts within the downtown area. In the broader context, such retail establishments were integral to fostering a sense of community by

creating links between local businesses and customers, thereby shaping the community and improving conditions for those within it.

On the flip side, as Chalmers, Venturoni, and Weiler (2012) found, when retailers leave a region, the sense of community actually diminishes. The authors suggest that the sense of community that locally-owned retail stores help to establish creates a stronger sense of purpose and identity for an entire downtown area, to the extent that the community may consider themselves separate from those outside of it (Chalmers et al., 2012). This strong sense of community can, in turn, be leveraged by those helping to sustain local businesses, further bolstering social and economic ties. This example illustrates how shopping at locally-owned stores may be considered an act of civic engagement, as it is one way to directly influence the shaping and improving of a community.

Sense of Place

Another way that consumers may be drawn to support businesses within their downtown area is through a close connection to the area or even to a specific store, through the concept of “sense of place.” Sense of place is a bond that an individual has with a physical location, which can even be a commercial setting (Debenedetti, Oppewal, & Arsel, 2014), and in the case of this dissertation, a specific group of retail stores and/or a downtown area. The revitalization of downtown areas across the United States appears to offer many favorable circumstances for providing a sense of attachment to a local place among consumers. That is, as Faulk (2006) indicates, because these revitalized downtown areas offer a “sense of place,” they are more attractive to consumers when

compared to big-box retailers built on large tracts of land in suburbia. The historic buildings and unique surroundings of downtowns are often in stark contrast to the “nowhere syndrome” of suburban shopping environments (Kunstler, 1993). The character of the area may further link consumers to the revitalized downtown and thereby compel them to support the business owners who have established stores and services within it.

Although the bond consumers have with places has been established (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004) and the advantages that downtown areas offer when it comes to the concept of sense of place has also been established (Robertson, 1999), how consumers behave based on sense of place prompted by revitalized downtowns is a topic that has yet to be investigated. Many revitalized downtown areas now host a variety of niche retailers, professional services, restaurants, and entertainment venues. The uniqueness and authenticity of such districts may offer an allure or evoke a sense of familiarity for consumers, which in turn, prompts them to reciprocate by acting as ambassadors for the place (Debenedetti, Oppewal, & Arsel, 2014). According to Debenedetti et al. (2014) this sense of place creates an exchange between consumers, retailers, and the place, as shoppers escape the “me too” feeling of suburban shopping malls full of chain stores. Consumption behaviors in support of downtown areas generated as a result of sense of place may contribute to further improving the community and conditions for everyone involved. The unique “sense of place” that a revitalized downtown shopping area affords may even prompt consumers to change their

consumption habits to focus on supporting the merchants within them to ensure their success and the success of the whole community.

Socially Conscious Consumers

Consumers may be motivated to be socially conscious in their consumption behaviors out of the desire to be civically engaged. Socially conscious consumption is about increasing awareness of the impact of one's consumption habits, and what Webster (1975) describes as consumption that attempts to "bring about social change" (p. 188). For some, socially conscious consumption may be a personal conviction, viewed as a moral choice, or obligation to contribute to the collective good of society (Atkinson, 2012). The motivation may be political or personal or both. Socially conscious consumption may be exhibited in the types of products consumers buy, where they buy them, or who they buy them from. However, one commonality is a shared interest in achieving the greater good from consumption behaviors. Shopping locally is one way that consumers can achieve this, by supporting local businesses who clearly have a vested interest in the community. Thus far, there are no academic studies that examine potential ties between socially conscious consumption and civic engagement.

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) suggest that consumers imbue subjective meaning into their consumption behaviors. To this end, the benefits that shopping downtown have for the locally-owned retailers, or even the makers of goods sold in these stores, may be assigned specific meaning by socially conscious consumers. Indeed, the additional effort required to be socially conscious in their consumption suggests that there is some inherent benefit to it. According to Atkinson (2012), socially conscious

consumers focus more on the benefits of the consumption act than the outcomes. For example, the pleasure derived from visiting a store where the owner is also a neighbor is more important than the difficulties in parking encountered when shopping in a downtown area. Consumers involved in socially conscious consumption consider not only their own desires for products or experiences, but also the collective good of their actions, and this, in turn, is communicated through their consumption behaviors (LaRoche, Bergeron, & Barbaro-Forleo, 2001). Because socially conscious consumers are often looking beyond the utilitarian or hedonic benefits of purchasing a product, such as supporting a business owner who is a community member, they are consuming with a purpose, which, in the case of this dissertation, is to contribute to the greater good within the community.

Voluntary Simplifiers

Voluntary simplifiers are one group of socially conscious consumers who feel they hold a great deal of power over their consumption habits, choosing to reduce their consumption and to focus on living more purpose-filled lives (Gregg, 1936). Likewise, voluntary simplifiers place great value on the community and often choose to consume with a purpose (Huneke, 2005), for example, paying more for items that are “green” or cause less harm to the environment (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Voluntary simplicity is considered a lifestyle choice and the values of those who choose to simplify center on living more simply and connecting more deeply with the community (Huneke, 2005). One trait common to many voluntary simplifiers is that when they do shop, they like to shop locally (Criag-Lees & Hill, 2002). Thus, as socially conscious consumers,

voluntary simplifiers are relevant to this dissertation, a point that will be discussed in depth in Chapter II.

Gender

Historically, consumption is gendered and considered to be part of the female domain (Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012), which often results in negative stereotypes of women (Steinberg, 2010). While consumers are growing more concerned about the social and environmental impact of their consumption practices, the literature indicates that women in particular are the most likely to hold socially conscious views (Mainieri, Barnett, Valdero, Unipan, & Oskamp, 1997). Not only are stronger environmental attitudes more common in women, but women are also the most likely group of consumers to voluntarily simplify (Huneke, 2005). Consequently, as will be discussed in Chapter II, the experiences of socially conscious females who have chosen to simplify may be relevant to this dissertation.

Consumers and Retailers: A Reciprocal Relationship

Socially conscious consumers may be likely to care about the vibrancy and sustainability of their local downtowns, which includes the store owners and the success of their stores. While consumption may typically focus on individualistic desires and self-interest, because socially conscious consumers desire to use their marketplace behaviors for collective good (Atkinson, 2012), supporting a locally-owned retailer may be as important as acquiring a necessary product. As Harrison, Newholm and Shaw (2005) describe, the behaviors of socially conscious consumers can be linked to consumer activism. A shared interest in the ideals of promoting consumer rights has

resulted in the socially conscious consumer (Harrison, Newholm, & Shaw, 2005). One reason socially conscious consumers may be more apt to shop locally is due to a shared desire to be socially embedded within their community. As Atkinson (2012) indicates, socially conscious consumers enjoy the social connection with those selling the products, as they know where their money is going and trust the sellers have the community's best interest in mind. Because the literature indicates that socially conscious consumers' marketplace behaviors are often dictated by such motivations as promoting consumer rights and using individual spending power to affect the greater good, the concept of socially conscious consumption is important to the overall purpose and objectives of this dissertation.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this dissertation was to understand the phenomenon of shopping locally from the perspective of the consumer and the store owner and within the context of a revitalized downtown. Three key objectives were developed to address this purpose: (1) to explore the reasons why consumers choose to shop locally in revitalized downtowns, (2) to investigate the reasons why store owners choose to operate within the revitalized downtown, and (3) to consider the implications of shopping locally within the revitalized downtown context for the broader community.

Findings from preliminary research on the topic informed the development of the objectives. Preliminary research was conducted with consumers who support local retailers and local retailers who contribute to a downtown community. It was found that locally-owned businesses sought to build community among store owners. To this end,

they often cross-posted events at each other's businesses on their social media sites, and even created a map of downtown with all of the locally-owned businesses included on it. Interviews with consumers revealed that many supported locally-owned businesses not only because they are places to purchase items, but also because of what these businesses represent to the community. In turn, as customers, they frequently promoted these locally-owned businesses on their personal social media accounts, urging friends and family to visit them, thereby helping to reinforce a community of stores and store owners in the area.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, many downtowns across America are experiencing a renaissance, as they once again offer residences and shopping opportunities in historic buildings that sat vacant for decades. Despite the growing interest in downtown revitalization, little to no academic research has addressed the role of locally-owned retail stores or considered the reasons why consumers choose to shop in these stores. Although research exists on downtown revitalization, it tends to focus primarily on urban planning, therefore there are many gaps in need of addressing through research on locally-owned retail stores within these communities.

Methodological Framework

Because the overall purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of local shopping in a revitalized downtown from both the consumer and retailer perspective, ethnographic methods were employed in this dissertation, as they are frequently used to explain phenomena occurring within society and culture (Sluka & Robben, 2007). An ethnographic approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of the

topic, which helps to alleviate the limited depth offered by previous research on the topic of local shopping. Exploring a phenomenon like local shopping is best suited to a holistic approach to data collection, such as ethnography. The wide array of data that ethnographic methods generate, from formal and informal interviews, to fieldwork and visual data, offered an in-depth means to examine social meanings used by a specific group or culture (Van Maanen, 1982). Ethnographic methods allow the researcher to become truly immersed in the setting, and therefore, to better understand the significance of the behaviors within it.

As will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter III, I spent eight weeks immersed in the field, which consists of a revitalized downtown area of a mid-sized city in the Southeastern United States. I engaged in observation at locally-owned establishments, where I had the opportunity to build relationships with business owners as well as talk with customers. Observation occurred in locally-owned coffee shops, restaurants, and breweries, as well as boutiques and other shops. I incorporated online data in the study by following the social media sites for each establishment included in this study, much like a customer would do to keep up with business happenings. I established contacts with “regular” customers and business owners alike and conducted in-depth interviews and informal interviews with them. In addition to customers and shop owners, I talked with representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and downtown development partnerships about downtown revitalization efforts. Combined, interviews and observation provided a more in-depth understanding of what shopping downtown at locally-owned stores means for individuals and the community.

Conceptual Scope and Significance

With the exception of food, literature on the topic of local shopping is very limited. Studies on local food tend to be centered around agriculture or relate specifically to consumer behavior at Farmer's markets. Beyond this, literature on the topic of local shopping is mostly non-existent, except for a few investigations into independent shops in the U.K (Coca-Stefaniak, Hallsworth, Parker, Bainbridge, & Yuste, 2005; Smith & Sparks, 2000) and findings specific to consumer groups (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002). Thus, it is apparent that little is known about the individuals who support locally-owned stores and their reasons for doing so. This dissertation was designed to address this gap in knowledge, and particularly how the topic relates to downtown revitalization.

While little is known about the individuals who support locally-owned stores, such stores are often responsible for a large proportion of the downtown retail landscape. Although past research has discussed the exodus of downtown retail over the decades, research on downtown revitalization tends to center on policy, urban planning, and improvement plans (Faulk, 2006). Very few studies have addressed the contribution of retail to downtown revitalization (Cohen, 2007; Padilla & Eastlick, 2008). When the role of retail is discussed, the focus is either on the overall retail mix and marketing strategies used by retailers to attract consumers (Padilla & Eastlick, 2008) or on the economic effects of retail (Weisbrod & Pollakowski, 1984). In addition, the connection between community and consumption is a link that has received little, if any, consideration in the literature (Chalmers, Gessner, Venturoni, & Weiler, 2012). Therefore, this study address these gaps while offering additional dimensions to what is known.

Moreover, existing studies on the power of sense of place and how it may contribute to consumers' shopping behaviors indicates that it is a topic of importance to locally-owned retailers in downtown areas. While it has been considered in a firm-specific context (Debenedetti, Oppewal, & Arsel, 2014) and within tourism literature (Lew, 1989), this study is the first to consider this concept in the context of local shopping. Last, shopping locally may serve as a form of civic engagement, a concept that is relevant to this dissertation. That is, shopping locally may be one way in which individuals are attempting to create positive changes in their communities through consumption.

Few, if any of the existing studies related to the topic employ theory to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon of local shopping. To address this gap, as will be discussed in the next chapter, practice theory was employed to frame an understanding of the experience of shopping locally. Practice theory is a theory of how social beings, each with their own diverse reasons and intentions, make and transform the world in which they live (Ortner, 2006). Practice theory considers everyday habits and routines as more than simple activities, but as observable social practices (Southerton, 2013). Thus, practice theory is described as centering on the circumstances surrounding the routines or practices that are carried out in everyday life, such as consumption (Halkier, Katz-Gerro, & Martens, 2011). In this dissertation, practice theory was used as a framework to gain a deeper understanding of the motives and circumstances surrounding the phenomenon of shopping locally.

Practice theory has re-emerged in recent years, particularly in studies on consumption. Sociologist Alan Warde (2005) explains practice theory relative to consumption as “a process whereby agents engage in appropriating and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion” (p. 137). Thus, consumption is an act that repeatedly offers the individual opportunities to change his or her practices, or what and how that individual consumes. As a result, the ways that individuals consume, including where they choose to consume, becomes a tool for creating and sustaining community. For this reason, practice theory has been used to address topics related to sustainable consumption and environmental behavior changes, however, this dissertation is the first to use it to investigate shopping locally.

Consumption plays an important role in the revitalization and continued support of downtown areas across the U.S. Because many of the establishments located in downtown areas are locally-owned, consumers who are civically engaged and interested in community may be motivated to support them. The importance of retail operations to burgeoning downtowns across the U.S. highlights the need for investigation into locally owned retail establishments and the people who support them.

Summary

In this chapter, the topic of the dissertation was discussed and the purpose and objectives were outlined. Background information on the topic, including issues related to downtown revitalization and local shopping through socially conscious consumption

and civic engagement, and the roles of both consumers and retailers in this process, was provided. A rationale for exploring these issues in more depth through a qualitative research design was provided, and the conceptual scope and significance of the study was discussed. The next chapter offers a review of the literature that informs the dissertation.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERATURE THAT INFORMS THE RESEARCH

The goal of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of what it means to shop locally. As introduced in Chapter I, three key objectives guided this dissertation: (1) to explore the reasons why consumers choose to shop locally in revitalized downtowns, (2) to investigate the reasons why store owners choose to operate within revitalized downtowns, and (3) to consider the implications of shopping locally within the revitalized downtown context for the broader community.

In this chapter, existing research relevant to the topic of shopping at locally-owned stores is outlined. To this end, the literature is discussed relative to three key themes: *Place* (including literature on downtowns and local businesses), *People* (discussing literature on socially conscious consumers and voluntary simplifiers), and *Practices* (literature related to civic engagement, locally-owned businesses, and responsible capitalism). Each of the three themes comprises a section of this chapter. These sections are followed by an overview of practice theory, including the origins of the theory, background on how the theory has been used, and specifically how it has been used in relation to consumption. The last section of this chapter provides an explanation of the conceptual framework. Core concepts are discussed within the broader framework of practice theory to offer theoretical insight into the topic. The review of relevant

literature reveals how the concepts come together to offer an understanding of what it means to shop locally.

Place

Shopping locally directly suggests the importance of place. To examine the role of place, this section begins with a review of the evolution of shopping and the role of the revitalized downtown. First, a brief history of downtown shopping is provided, alongside discussion of the transition to suburban shopping areas, followed by the recent return to shopping downtown. This is followed by a discussion of the significance of retail and locally-owned business for revitalized downtowns. This section concludes with an explanation of how the concept of “sense of place” contributes to an investigation of shopping local, and particularly in revitalized downtowns.

The Cyclical Evolution of Downtown Shopping

Until the middle of the twentieth century, downtown landscapes in cities and towns served as centers for commerce and social activities across the U.S. Downtowns housed the majority of the population, the largest buildings, and major infrastructure such as mass transit and electricity (Evans, 2011). After the Second World War, downtown areas began to deteriorate due to the desire and opportunity for more and larger single-family housing, as well as growth in automobile ownership (Burayidi, 2001; Norquist, 1998). In turn, the suburbanization of America led to a proliferation of chain stores and super stores located near suburban housing developments or on the outskirts of town, taking people away from the downtown area (Halebsky, 2004).

The development and spread of such stores changed where and how consumers in the United States shopped, taking sales from locally-owned retailers, and in turn, often leading to their demise (Gruidl & Kline, 1992; Muller & Humstone, 1996; Stone, 1996; Stone, Artz, & Myles, 2002). In addition, physical changes occurred, as retail stores transformed shopper expectations when the amount of shopping space that once existed doubled in the twenty-year period from 1970 to 1990 (Blevins, 1996). Indeed, chain stores differ from most downtown retailers not only in location, but in size and merchandise offered. A superstore such as Walmart may be as large as 200,000 square feet, and the merchandise offerings may be highly specialized. Aptly termed, “category killers,” the effect these stores have had on local competition selling similar products has been negative (Halebsky, 2004).

Going downtown to shop is an old idea that has been made new again. Recently, attempts to revitalize vacant downtown areas have helped to spur retail development (Cohen, 2007). The Millennial generation in particular, or those born between the years 1977 and 1995, has been described as desiring more connection to their communities, forsaking traditional malls in order to work, shop, and live within downtown areas (Loyer, 2015). Although suburban living is desirable to many, it may be less appealing to young professionals. This lack of appeal suggests a favorable climate for downtown areas that are in the process of revitalization, many which are being revived with an eclectic mix of shops, restaurants, and events (Loyer, 2015).

Although signs point to the potential for downtown areas to return to their former glory, success is not necessarily a given. As Evans (2011) suggested,

We should not be surprised or distressed when certain types of retailing fall into disfavor and others emerge to replace them. Rather, we need to see how and why specific retailing institutions and practices have evolved and where they are headed – and adapt strategies accordingly. As the adage goes, ‘The past is a prologue to the future.’ (p. 5)

Evan’s (2011) ideas point to the need for stores to fit the place in which they seek to operate and suggests there may be a need for locally-owned stores to fill downtown areas once again. Yet the potential re-emergence of downtown areas as shopping destinations has yet to be fully examined in the literature, hence the focus of this dissertation on exploring the role of shopping local in the context of downtown revitalization. The next section considers the significance of retail on downtown revitalization.

The Role of Retail in Revitalizing Downtowns

In the past, shopping in one’s local village or marketplace was often the only option for commerce. Today, with the prevalence of online shopping, consumers can purchase items around the clock and from almost anywhere in the world. Likewise, the role of downtown areas in the process of shopping has changed. Once catering to most, if not all of a consumer’s needs, now downtowns tend to host a variety of niche retailers, professional services, restaurants, and entertainment venues (Faulk, 2006). As more and more retail choices emerge and become available to consumers, understanding shopping choices is an important area for consumer research. As will be discussed in this section, research on the topic of downtown revitalization encompasses numerous disciplines and foci, yet there remain noticeable gaps in areas pertinent to the focus of this dissertation.

Local shopping has been investigated specific to transportation, automobile usage, and urban planning (Handy & Clifton, 2001). Research relative to inshopping and

outshopping also discusses local shopping, but it is focused less on the physical location of the store and more on store ownership and operation (e.g., Dalal, Al-Khatib, DaCosta, & Ronald, 1994; Hozier & Stem, 1985). Moreover, the few examples of research on locally-owned retail stores that do exist tend to be focused specifically on the United Kingdom (Bennison, Warnaby, & Pal, 2010; Coca-Stefaniak, Hallsworth, Parker, Bainbridge, & Yuste, 2005; Smith & Sparks, 2000), which offers a particular perspective based on the local culture. The one study that does offer an account of local merchant loyalty is specific to gender and motivation as driving forces (Noble, Griffith, & Adjei, 2006) and is based on a survey of consumers on seven specific indicators of loyalty.

While there is an abundance of literature addressing the overall revitalization of downtown areas, and a limited few that are specific to shopping locally, much less research exists in relation to the role of locally-owned retail stores in such areas. As Sneed, Runyan, Swinney, and Lin (2011) noted, numerous sources, often related to urban planning, have cited retail as an important factor in the revitalization of downtown areas. Downtown retail has been described as “the essential glue of the city” (Mouat, 1980, para. 5), in that retail presence is a key component making for downtown viability (Robertson, 1995). Retail stores in the revitalized downtown area serve numerous purposes, most notably economic and social support.

The revitalization of downtowns can benefit a city both in terms of economic growth and building community. Yet, the revitalization of downtowns is not limited to large cities, as small towns also have an interest in revitalizing their downtown areas in hopes of recapturing the vitality that once existed across the U.S. (Horowitz, 2016).

Moreover, revitalized downtowns typically offer the most expensive real estate in a city or town (Leinberger, 2005).

Alongside the economic benefits that revitalized downtowns offer, these areas often act as symbols and represent the city to locals as well as out of town visitors, drawing them downtown and creating a lasting impression of the city (Kitsinger, 2013). The revitalization of downtown areas across the United States appears to be advantageous for locally-owned retail stores willing to be pioneers by entering downtowns that have yet to be revitalized, as they may reap numerous benefits. Yet, outside of information that may be widely available to the public, little empirical evidence of the benefits of downtown revitalization for locally-owned retailers exists. The present study helps to address this gap.

In a downtown area, retail makes both economic- and community-related contributions. Whether it is out of town visitors or families coming in from the suburbs, having a reason to come downtown and shop brings money into the area (Leinberger, 2005). For example, as one study sponsored by the Institute for Local Living found, local businesses return a significantly greater amount of revenue to their local economies, at 52% compared to only 14% for national retailers. With respect to restaurants, 79% of revenue was reported as being returned to the local economy, as opposed to just 30% for national chain restaurants (Stebbins, 2014).

A vibrant downtown area is a compelling advantage for companies and businesses within the city that are looking to recruit talent. As Leinberger (2005) indicated, car-reliant suburban metro areas are not typically as useful for recruiting out of town talent.

Florida (2002) found that cities that are able to attract workers of the “creative class” are also more apt to experience economic growth and prosperity, and it is primarily the cities with revitalized downtowns that offer this advantage. According to Florida (2002), the “creative class,” are vital to cities, as their roles are described as being knowledge intensive, innovative, and creative. This group also helps to solve problems using diverse skill sets and bodies of knowledge (Florida, 2002). Cities with revitalized downtowns frequently offer vibrant neighborhoods that are attractive to such individuals (Leinberger, 2005), which is important because, according to Florida (2002), individuals of the creative class are considered to be a leading force of growth in the economy.

Although research related to the topics of local shopping and downtown revitalization exists, there is a gap related to their collective contributions. For example, research investigating and documenting local food shopping appears to be on the increase (e.g. Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Ballantine & Creery, 2002; Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005), however, the need for research about other types of local consumption remains. Moreover, in most existing studies, “local shopping” has been considered specific to rural areas or agricultural production. For example, Lyson and Tolbert (1996) found that small towns offering an abundance of locally-owned businesses are more economically stable than places where large or chain establishments exist. Likewise, Fleming and Goetz (2011) found a positive link between locally-owned businesses and income growth per capita. Such benefits are obviously advantageous for cities and towns of all sizes. Yet most examinations briefly mention local shopping or local business ownership, without making them the focus of the research. A further example of this is Strom and Kerstein’s

(2017) analysis of redevelopment in the city of Asheville, NC. The authors mention that the revitalized downtown area is home to numerous locally-owned retailers as opposed to chain stores, yet this is not the focus of the investigation and the authors do not discuss how these establishments may or may not have impacted revitalization efforts. Thus, while there has been a lot of research conducted on related topics, findings remain quite narrow in scope. The focus of this dissertation therefore broadens the knowledge by exploring the role of locally-owned retail stores as important to the success of revitalized downtowns.

Alongside the economic benefits, local shopping also generates social benefits within the downtown community. For example, local shopping tends to offer one-of-a-kind shopping experiences and opportunities to receive better service from a locally-owned business, as these stores may invest more time in hiring and training to ensure employees are knowledgeable about the products for sale. Indeed, as a result of retail moving to the suburbs, the more unique product offerings that used to be found downtown were replaced with uniform ones, and the personal touch of the independent retailer was replaced with more starkly corporate operations (Halebsky, 2004). Such vast changes in the retail industry resulted in a small number of “big box” retailers wielding enormous power and dominating the market, changing not only retail stores, but the relationships that once existed between retailers and the communities in which they operated (Schiller, Zellner, Stodghill, & Il, 1992). A return to more locally-owned retail stores in revitalized downtowns may offer more social benefits to the community by renewing these relationships.

Conversely, locally-owned businesses often invest in the community. Thus, by supporting business owners who are local, consumers are investing in the local community by connecting with business owners who often take a more collaborative approach to business, and therefore contribute more to the well-being of the community (Why Buy Local, n.d.). Indeed, though little academic research exists related to the importance of shopping at locally-owned retailers, there is evidence that benefits do exist. For example, Mitchell (2007) contends that purchasing from locally-owned businesses benefits the community by bringing people together and supporting those in the community. Although some suggest that shopping locally only protects the privilege of local business owners and does not actually extend such benefits to the community at large (Desrochers & Shimizu, 2012; Guthman, 2004; Hinrichs, 2003), it is plausible that locally-owned businesses do benefit the community, if not solely on an economic basis.

Given the limitations within the existing literature, and the limited number of topics addressed regarding the significance of local shopping, findings of this dissertation contribute to the literature by providing breadth and depth to the understanding of the experiences of those involved with local shopping. Why business owners decide to set up shop in downtown areas, and, in turn, what drives consumers to shop at these stores, are both questions that have gone unexplained in the literature. Likewise, each of these questions has implications for both local business owners as well as communities, and particularly those with hopes for revitalization.

Recent interest in revitalizing downtown areas has resulted from numerous initiatives attempting to entice both people and businesses back to downtown areas across

the U.S. (Faulk, 2006). As Burayidi (2001) indicates, once bustling centers have become rundown and often offer only low-income housing, which requires residents to commute to the suburbs for more profitable employment and access to amenities. Consequently, much research on downtown revitalization has focused on low-income housing programs and how government funding for such initiatives has failed (Anderson, 1964; Hays, 1985; Teafor, 1990).

Likewise, shifting the location of where shopping occurred impacted downtown communities. Thus, as locally-owned merchants who were involved with the community were replaced by chain stores and corporate retailers who lack connection to the community (Mitchell, 2000), the community, and specifically downtowns, suffered. However, it is interesting to note that chain stores and category killers throughout the U.S. are once again undergoing significant changes, as retailing continues to evolve and consumer expectations change. Stores that were once mainstays in malls across the U.S. are closing at a record pace (Wattles, 2017). Reports of more anticipated store closings, bankruptcy filings and continued struggle by major retailers make news headlines on a regular basis (Malinsky, 2017). Such reports indicate no foreseeable end as retailers vacate malls and entire shopping centers sit vacant, further indicating the shifting landscape of retail in the U.S. According to a report from AMP Capital (2013), e-commerce has been the greatest contributor to the decline of the U.S. shopping mall, in that, since 2005 at least 19% of growth in the retail sector is due to online sales as the gap between online and brick and mortar sales grows larger. Although online sales are not expected to diminish, and the brick and mortar store remains, consumer expectations

regarding the latter may impact the kinds of retailers who succeed in local communities, and especially in downtown areas.

In a similar vein, Leinberger (2005) found that a sense of excitement about the downtown area is necessary in order to attract store owners to the area. In turn, due to the types of retailers found in downtown areas, they are expected to offer the excitement consumers demand. Indeed, as Warnaby, Bennison, and Davies (2005) indicate, retail is necessary for urban redevelopment. Likewise, Cohen (2007) illustrated how retail played a pivotal role in the success of reviving the downtown areas of New Haven and Boston after WWII. In both cities, department stores were central to revitalization efforts, serving as anchors for further development, including mass transit, providing jobs, and establishing the stores themselves as landmarks for the cities (Cohen, 2007).

Factors impacting downtown revitalization are numerous and include the size of the city, traffic, proximity to walkable neighborhoods and even the viability of large historic buildings or landmarks (Faulk, 2006). For example, an abandoned theater or department store may hold strong historical value but it may also be in a state of disrepair, requiring large investments to repurpose or update. Smaller cities often face different revitalization challenges than larger ones due to issues like the crime rate, size, and walkability of the downtown area (Robertson 2001), as well as proximity to historic landmarks (Robertson, 1999). Developments that have occurred over time may have greatly impacted the downtown areas of larger cities, for example highway construction cutting across what may have been a historic building, or potentially wiping out an entire neighborhood (Robertson, 1999).

Added problems complicating downtown revitalization efforts are the often vague plans for and boundaries around the area. Conceptualizing how the space could be used is frequently the first obstacle, and then acquiring financing to restore the space makes for a process that often happens one building at a time, highlighting the lengthy timeline for city revitalization projects (Faulk, 2006). One final complication that exists in regards to understanding downtown development is the lack of specific designations of the boundaries that constitute the downtown area (Birch, 2002; Burayidi, 2001). This lack of designation complicates efforts when explaining downtown revitalization and makes for a challenge in addition to factors that must be considered on an individual basis. On the flip side, these challenges offer a lot of opportunity for research related to the topic.

Existing literature on downtown revitalization often presents case studies prescribing how to implement programs and policies, including funding revitalization initiatives (Burayidi, 2001). Most published attempts to assist cities in revitalization projects involve re-telling what has been done in other locations, describing both successes and failures (Faulk, 2006). Yet, as Faulk (2006) indicates, such general approaches are rarely useful, as they do not account for the unique circumstances particular to a given downtown revitalization effort. Generic approaches are frequently attempted and, in turn, prove unsuccessful. Conversely, the literature that addresses revitalization efforts often communicates highly specific, versus generalizable, information. For example, the number of jobs created, special event attendance, or summaries regarding the number of structures that have been rejuvenated in one specific downtown area are not easily translated to other downtown efforts, nor do they consider

the overall growth of the downtown area in relation to other parts of the city or town (Faulk, 2006).

In one example that offers more general applications, Robertson (1995) summarized seven well-documented approaches to downtown revitalization projects. Each may be considered a key factor in the process, including: (a) pedestrian friendly downtown, (b) creation of an indoor shopping area downtown to compete with suburban ones, (c) reuse of historic buildings downtown, (d) the development of space on downtown waterfronts, (e) creating office space that will assist in supporting restaurants and housing, (f) locating sports stadiums or event centers in the downtown area, and (g) transportation to offset the lack of parking available in most downtown areas. Housing is an additional strategy for downtown revitalization efforts (Sohmer, 1999). That is, downtown populations have grown since the 1990s (Birch, 2002), and housing is often seen as a first step toward supporting retail due to the presence of full-time residents, rather than a customer base that is around only during business hours.

As is clearly seen here, there has been a lot of research relative to downtown revitalization, however, more is needed to understand the significance of retail and especially locally-owned stores in such areas. Retail in revitalized downtowns is clearly a vital part of creating a place where people can work and live through an atmosphere that bonds people to the place, as will be discussed in the next section. Yet, due to the relatively recent re-emergence of many downtowns across the U.S., research on the topic is lacking. Investigating the role of retail establishments in revitalized downtowns offers a better understanding of how they contribute to the success of these areas. Discussion of

unique atmosphere that is often attributed to downtown areas and its role in downtown revitalization is provided next.

Revitalized Downtowns and A Sense of Place

Visiting a downtown area of a city may evoke feelings and memories that grow in importance the more one visits the downtown area. While much is known about the powerful effects that sense of sight and sound may have on shoppers (Robertson, 1999), little research has investigated the importance of sense of place and how it impacts a downtown shopping area. Sense of place is described as an emotional bond an individual has with a place (Kleine & Baker, 2004) and is individualized through one's interactions as it evolves over time through repeated exposure to as well as memories of the place (Relph, 1985; Tuan, 1974, 1977). Typically, a sense of place includes attachment to the physical and the social aspects of the place. Both are relevant to locally-owned retailers in downtowns, as physical aspects of retailers and the downtown area are frequently different from modern shopping centers, and the potential for social ties is greater.

Extant literature on brand attachment provides strong indication of the effects of attachment (e.g. Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010; Thomson 2006), and studies have examined how places like homes, landscapes, and even cities (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004) may contribute to sense of place. For instance, one study found that the physical connections, including gentrification and "boutiquing," have created a sense of place (Zukin, Trujillo, Frase, Jackson, Recuber, & Walker, 2009). However, few of these studies consider how individuals attach meaning to those places via retail businesses. More specifically, research has yet to examine the attachment

consumers have to retail places, and in the case of this dissertation, a downtown area comprised of many locally-owned businesses, all of which may contribute to and exhibit their own unique sense of place as parts within the overall whole.

According to Sneed, Runyan, Swinney and Lin (2011) “the very identity of a city is intimately tied to the city’s downtown” (p. 125). The downtown may be considered the “heart and soul” of a city (Robertson, 1995). Such areas may be important assets for cities, in that revitalized downtown areas offer a sense of place that is more attractive to some consumers, as compared to big box retailers on large tracts of land in suburbia (Faulk, 2006). The historic buildings and surroundings of such areas challenge the stark contrast of “nowhere syndrome,” or, what Kunstler (1993) calls suburban shopping environments. Thus, downtowns offer a distinctiveness that has evolved over time and that often represents the lives of many generations (Robertson, 1999). Indeed, these aspects contribute to the physical dimension of sense of place. Suburban shopping centers, on the other hand, were built at one point in time and tend to represent one style of architecture and the priorities of the time period in which they were built, therefore lacking a real sense of place (Robertson, 1999).

A downtown shopping area may be home to more locally-owned businesses, which can also contribute to a sense of place. The literature indicates that there is a negative impact on sense of place and regional charm when locally-owned businesses are replaced with chain retailers, essentially disrupting the “unique” or “quaint” environment of an area (Dunham-Jones, 1997; Gratz & Mintz, 1998; Hough, 1990). A revitalized downtown area may house a variety of locally-owned businesses and create a place

where people want to linger, making a day out of shopping and enjoying the place not just for the functional aspects of shopping that it offers. As Robertson (1999) found, a distinct sense of place is a significant advantage for downtowns, in that these areas offer unique physical spaces as well as social ties for consumers looking for more from their shopping and/or dining experiences.

In addition to the aesthetic differences that a downtown shopping area offers consumers, the social relationships it provides may also differ. As Brocato, Baker, and Voorhees (2013) indicate, the attachment to a place is not the same as attachment to tangible goods and this is due, in part, to the social relationships individuals have with a place and the identity of it. For example, many of the establishments in downtown areas such as coffee shops, bars or breweries, and book stores may also serve as “third-places.” A “third place” is neither one’s home nor workplace (Oldenburg, 1989) but a place that is “conducive to informal conversations and casual friendships, where patrons imbibe a comforting sense of community, camaraderie, and social engagement” (Thompson & Arsel, 2004, p. 633). If consumers view a store or downtown establishment in such a way, it is possible that the connections they have with these establishments are much deeper than the connections they have with chain retailers. As a result, their reasons for shopping in such places may reflect this level of connection. Oldenburg (1989) suggests that chain stores are fundamentally averse to offering these experiences. Social connections, both real and perceived, in locally-owned stores may contribute to positive feelings and memories for those individuals who visit downtown shopping areas, further solidifying an attachment to the area.

Because a strong sense of place has been found to be an advantage for a downtown area (Robertson, 1999), and because locally-owned businesses may indeed act as a “third place” for consumers by offering more than just products and services, this is an aspect of downtown retail that needs to be examined. Investigating not only the bonds that consumers have with the area, but how these bonds have evolved over time, can shed light on the experience of shopping local in the context of a revitalized downtown. The second conceptual area, *People*, and the concepts related to it are discussed next.

People

Understanding what shopping locally means requires an examination of the people involved as much as the place. Thus, the topic of “people” is addressed through a brief discussion of the concept of consumer activism, particularly through the literature on socially conscious consumers and how consumption may be viewed as a form of activism. Next, the literature on voluntary simplifiers, which is a particular segment of socially conscious consumers, will be addressed, as well as the ways in which these consumers are relevant to this dissertation. Last, the role of gender is examined in relation to consumer activism and the concept of shopping locally.

Consumption as Activism

Because it is embedded in social relations, consumption can be used as a tool for change (Micheletti, 2003). According to Micheletti and Bostrom (2014), when individuals select products and services based on a desire to change something, whether environmental, ethical, or market practices, it is considered consumer activism. Consumption as activism can occur in a variety of ways, from support for corporate

social responsibility, ethical treatment of animals, sustainability of natural resources, labor conditions and human rights issues, to name just a few. Regardless of the cause, consumer activism involves advocating for the rights or well-being of another group through marketplace activity (Micheletti & Bostrom, 2014). Consumer activism can also occur based on the places in which consumption activities occur, such as choosing to shop locally.

Consumer activism is frequently considered a collective action, whether through boycotts, which is the choice to not purchase products (Micheletti, 2003), or conversely, through buycotts, which is the deliberate decision to buy specific products in order to support a moral or political concern (Sandovici & Davis, 2010). Yet, as Micheletti (2003) suggests, there is a deeper personal commitment to consumer activism when it is related to a lifestyle, in that it is a sense of responsibility to the public through one's private actions. Outside of these two established practices of political consumption, boycotting and buycotting, little is known about the individual actions consumers take to support a cause or idea, including that of downtown revitalization. With respect to this dissertation, activism through consumption is not being considered in such terms, as boycotts and buycotts alike tend to underscore what are usually more collective and organized actions. Rather, the individual actions and decisions of consumers are the focus. That is, the concept of consumer activism is examined in terms of the shopping habits of individuals, and particularly those advocating for locally-owned businesses that are located within the downtown area.

While much of literature tends to focus on the negative impacts of consumption, there are benefits that can result from consumption. As Nelson, Rademacher, and Paek (2007) suggest, consumer activism has “transformed some consumers into individuals who consciously consider the consequences of consumption and who routinely ask, how, where, and by whom a product is made” (p. 145). This assertion is just one example of a positive impact individuals can make, advocating for the rights and livelihoods of others through their marketplace behaviors. Considering consumption as a purely negative behavior not only dismisses its beneficial aspects, but also ignores those individuals who seek to create change through their consumption choices and habits. Individuals who seek to impact the greater good through consumption are discussed in the following section. For the purposes of this dissertation, those who choose to shop locally are considered activists in their own right, in as much as the impact these individuals have on the broader community is a central focus of the study. One type of consumer activism, known as socially conscious consumption, is discussed in the next section.

Socially Conscious Consumers

Socially conscious consumers are defined as consumers who feel strongly that they have direct influence on the market environment and consider the social impact of their consumption choices (Webster, 1975). Socially conscious consumption and consumer activism are closely related concepts in the literature on the development of consumer markets through time. For example, Harrison, Newholm, and Shaw (2005) provide an example of individuals in the village of Rochdale, located in the northwest of England, who established a food co-operative in the 1840s. Unhappy with prices and

selection, these consumers advocated for influence over what was produced and sold, forming a co-operative to combat high prices on inferior goods, with profits being shared among them rather than being collected by an individual owner. They focused on the principle of consumers helping consumers and building a better world while standing up to exploitation by the capitalistic economy (Harrison et al., 2005). The idea spread, and this new form of retail continued to grow into the twentieth century, until the communal principle lessened and consumer control diminished under the influence of large format retailers. However, with time, food co-operatives have reemerged, bringing about a new consumer movement that has been successful in capturing the attention of those concerned about food production, product quality, and social consciousness.

Although the popularity of the co-operative retailer diminished by the mid-20th century, the 1960s brought about another wave of consumer activism, as groups of socially conscious consumers focused on concerns about the environment. Academic research focusing on socially conscious consumers also began to grow in the late 1960s. Early thought in the field attempted to determine who socially conscious consumers were and to profile them through demographic and psychographic information (e.g., Anderson & Cunningham, 1972; Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968; Webster, 1975). Consensus between findings of early studies is minimal, but socio-economic status and level of education were reported as frequently correlating with a concern for the environment when compared to other demographic data, such as age or occupation (Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980; Webster, 1975).

In addition to noting demographic aspects, Webster (1975) suggested personality as being a potential predictor of socially conscious consumption. To this end, Webster (1975) posited the need to look beyond just demographics, and to identify personality traits and attitudes of socially conscious consumers. Key findings from both Webster's (1975) and Berkowitz and Lutterman's (1968) studies indicate that an interest in community involvement and an attitude of high perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE) are crucial factors in defining socially conscious consumers.

By the 1980s, after two decades of seeking identifying characteristics of socially conscious consumers, the literature still lacked consensus. Van Liere and Dunlap's (1980) study offered a review of previous empirical research on the topic through examination of the prevailing hypotheses and demographic and social factors attributed to socially conscious consumers. Through their efforts, they compiled findings on the topic and provided clarity regarding demographic relationships, particularly between age, income, occupation, education, residence, gender and political party. The three relationships that were identified to have the most positive, yet still modest support for associations with socially conscious consumers were those of age, education, and political party, revealing that younger, well-educated and more liberal individuals are more likely to show concern about the environment through their consumption choices (Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980). Van Liere and Dunlap (1980) suggested the need to consider potential cross-over concerns among socially conscious consumers, for example, whether concern regarding pollution could conceivably be carried over to concern about another environmental issue, such as recycling.

As consumers continued to change, researchers continued to search for consistently identifiable and definable data about socially conscious consumers. In the 1990s, Roberts' (1996) nationwide study sought to develop an updated profile of the socially conscious consumer. Roberts (1996) hypothesized that, in conjunction with updated demographic information, attitudes were also key predictors for socially conscious consumer behavior. Findings offered support for the idea that individuals who rank high in perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE) and possess a greater internal locus of control are the most likely to engage in socially conscious consumer behavior. Roberts (1996) also found that researchers could not generalize that socially conscious consumers hold similar attitudes about all "green" issues. In particular, attitudes about "green" behaviors could not be extended from one issue, such as recycling, to another, such as pollution. This finding echoed that of Van Liere and Dunlap (1980), who were the first to posit that generalizations cannot be made about "green" behaviors of socially conscious consumers.

At the end of the 1990s, Straughan and Roberts' (1999) study of the segmentation of green consumers provided a near perfect replication of the results of Roberts' (1996) study, and found that psychological segmentation methods are the most successful in profiling the consumer. This is something that Webster (1975) had suggested long before. Straughan and Roberts (1999) found that not only is PCE a stronger predictor of socially conscious consumer behavior, but it is even stronger than a consumer's level of environmental concern.

Moving into the 21st century, instead of attempting to profile socially conscious consumers, researchers began to focus on smaller and more manageable issues related to investigating these consumers. For example, La Roche, Bergeron, and Barbaro-Forleo (2001) examined whether there is a willingness among these consumers to pay more for green products. The authors found that consumers who do not find it to be an inconvenience to behave in socially conscious ways are also more likely to pay more for green products. This finding supports the suggestion that Webster (1975) initially made regarding PCE as a predictor for socially conscious consumer behavior.

Despite the need for going beyond demographics, studies continued to focus on profiling and defining socially conscious consumers. For example, Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics, and Bohlen (2003) considered the relationships between the most frequently hypothesized variables (gender, marital status, number of children, education and social class) alongside attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors. The authors determined that the associations were highly complex and, once again, inconsistent across circumstances. However, they did find that females are more likely to hold strong environmental attitudes and to adopt more socially conscious shopping habits (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003). Strong environmental attitudes among female consumers has actually been recognized as a consistent finding across the literature, including studies by La Roche, Bergeron, and Barbaro-Forleo (2001), Mainieri, Barnett, Valdero, Unipan, and Oskamp (1997), Roberts (1990), and Van Liere and Dunlap (1968).

Moving beyond simply defining socially conscious consumers, interest in the field continued to grow while the focus proliferated. From the 1990s onward, researchers

have tended to focus on more precise aspects of consumption related to socially conscious consumers. The subject matter receiving the most attention in these attempts is food consumption behaviors, which has been found to be one of the first changes that a socially conscious consumer makes to his or her lifestyle (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013). Considering the aforementioned importance of PCE as found in some studies, it seems natural that food choices would be an area where most consumers feel they have some control over their consumption behaviors.

While the numerous studies discussed here do not necessarily provide a unified profile of socially conscious consumers, their efforts remain influential, as findings established an overall awareness of the need to understand socially conscious consumers. Likewise, such investigations synthesized ideas, allowing for further exploration in hopes that a better understanding of socially conscious consumers and their behaviors can be achieved. Although the literature supports the idea that some consumers are in fact more likely to engage in socially conscious behaviors, and think that they can make an impact through their consumption choices, little is known about how these consumers may use shopping locally to create change.

Although a great deal of literature exists on the topic, the attempts to define and profile socially conscious consumers have resulted in a rather loosely defined profile of these individuals. Yet, because socially conscious consumers feel they have a direct influence on the environment and consider the social impact of their consumption (Webster, 1975), this particular group of consumers is relevant to the study of local

shopping. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding why they choose to shop in these locations.

As Harrison, Newholm, and Shaw (2005) indicated, a communal aspect to consumption existed among early socially conscious consumers. This concept may still be relevant with regards to shopping locally, especially the idea that it returns revenues to the local community. Moreover, the concept of PCE (perceived consumer effectiveness) has been found to contribute to socially conscious consumer behavior (Roberts, 1996). However, it is not known whether PCE extends to the locations where individuals choose to shop and whether these individuals perceive shopping locally as a way to effectively impact the community. In sum, researchers in the field have identified a wide variety of characteristics that define socially conscious consumers, yet where they choose to shop and their reasons for choosing these locations have been largely ignored in the literature. One aspect of research related to socially conscious consumers centers around a specific group of consumers known as *voluntary simplifiers*, which will be discussed next.

Voluntary Simplifiers

In the literature on socially conscious consumers, variations of consumer segments have been identified based on the extent to which they identify as socially conscious or have adapted their lives because of such views. In essence, voluntary simplifiers feel that their consumption habits are one area where they hold a great deal of control and power, and that their consumption behaviors can result in positive outcomes.

In the literature, voluntary simplifiers are related to both socially conscious consumption and to the notion of anti-consumption. Gregg (1936) coined the term

“voluntary simplicity,” and described it as living simply both in theory and in practice, with a penchant for honesty and purpose in life and discontent with the practice of conspicuous consumption, or an understanding that possessions are immaterial to living life with a purpose. Etzioni (1998) updated the notion and added emphasis on free will as a motive for voluntary simplicity rather than other motivations, such as economic motives or authoritative pressure. Elgin and Mitchell (1977) suggested that voluntary simplifiers may be classified on a continuum, varying from full, to partial sympathizers, to indifferent, to unaware, to opposed. Later, Etzioni (1998) reduced it to three levels based on intensity, including “downshifters,” or those who simply try to cut back on consumption; “strong simplifiers,” or those who considerably rearrange their lives to simplify; and at the highest intensity, “holistic simplifiers,” or those who have not only changed the way they live, but also hold strong convictions about their philosophies on consumption. This last group is often classified as being anti-consumption. Etzioni’s (1998) descriptions have since been accepted within the literature on voluntary simplicity. The ways that voluntary simplifiers are classified are based on factors such as their attitudes, values, lifestyles, and motivations for consumption. Each of these elements will be discussed in more detail here to provide a clearer picture of who voluntary simplifiers are and how their attributes may suggest a connection to shopping locally.

Although the literature attempting to define and provide the broader context of socially conscious consumption lacks consistency, research on voluntary simplifiers has resulted in a more precise understanding of this specific segment. Among voluntary

simplifiers, similarities appear to exist in terms of motivations, lifestyle factors, behaviors, attitudes, and values, as well as several dimensions of their consumption habits.

While the specific motivations vary between individuals, similarities exist regarding the underlying catalysts. For example, Shaw and Newholm (2002) found that the search for equilibrium in life is an important motivation, which may allow for more time to spend on things such as hobbies, outdoor pursuits, and anything non-materialistic, or, as Ballantine and Creery (2010) suggested, a self-discovery process. Craig-Lees and Hill (2002) further described motivational factors such as humanism, a high level of social consciousness and spiritual factors, and essentially the understanding that happiness cannot be purchased. Etzioni (1998), along with Pepper, Jackson, and Uzzell (2009) posited that the motivation behind voluntary simplicity should not be regulated by financial concerns, but by a deeper concern for larger issues that relate to values and lifestyle choices.

Findings on voluntary simplifiers suggest that it is a lifestyle choice. That is, consumption habits are shaped by the desire for a life that is not so work-oriented (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002). Moreover, as Bekin, Carrigan, and Szmigin (2005) suggested, some voluntary simplifiers go so far as to find jobs that pay less, but provide the desired work-life balance. As Shaw and Newholm (2002) found, voluntary simplifiers are reluctant to work just to support unnecessary consumption. In addition to the overall goal of a simpler lifestyle, both Craig-Lees and Hill's (2002) and Huneke's (2005) studies found

that overall, voluntary simplifiers' lifestyles include greater involvement in the community and this is the case among both rural and urban individuals.

Because there are a myriad of attitudes, values, and behaviors identified in the literature on voluntary simplifiers, these individuals are identified on a continuum. For example, some voluntary simplifiers do not change their level of consumption but instead choose to consume with a purpose. Some might buy certain brands or products due to a capacity for being refilled, recycled, or reused, or because of energy efficiency (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Many voluntary simplifiers emphasize reducing or severely limiting consumption, and therefore engage in aspects of self-sufficiency, such as growing their own food, using solar panels for power, or repairing items rather than replacing them, in an effort to avoid consumption (Ballantine & Creery, 2010). In a similar vein, Bekin, Carrigan, and Szmigin (2005) identified behaviors among voluntary simplifiers that reinforce the importance of community, such as bartering, trading, and sharing. However, Black and Cherrier (2010) observed that the more intensely one identifies with voluntary simplicity, the more likely he or she is to prioritize reduced consumption. As for the development of these behaviors, Pepper, Jackson, and Uzzell (2009) indicated that voluntary simplifiers are likely to start out by consuming with a purpose, which usually means purchasing green products.

Understanding the attitudes and values of voluntary simplifiers is important for distinguishing them as a specific group of socially conscious consumers. Huneke (2005) found that a strong interest in one's community is a common attitude among voluntary simplifiers, as are greater values placed on family, education, and the ability to live well-

rounded and fulfilled lives. Shaw and Newholm (2002) noted that, overall, voluntary simplifiers share a negative attitude toward consumer culture. Alexander and Ussher (2012) and Ballantine and Creery (2010) supported this finding by discovering that product quality is important to voluntary simplifiers, in hopes that quality items will last longer and be replaced less often. For voluntary simplifiers, it is not just the purpose of an item, but its history that is valued (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Shaw & Newholm, 2002), highlighting a preference for secondhand items (Ballantine & Creery, 2010; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Shaw & Newholm, 2002).

According to the literature, it appears that voluntary simplifiers attempt to control their consumption habits through various approaches to and dimensions of simple living. Food purchases, homes, and possessions are areas most significantly altered by the lifestyle choice. Indeed, food consumption is frequently the first area in which changes are made by those seeking to be voluntary simplifiers. Craig-Lees and Hill (2002) indicated that voluntary simplifiers are interested in knowing how products are made and whether they are sourced locally rather than coming from mass manufacturers. An overall desire for control of food consumption practices is common, and one specific dimension of this seems to be having access to the people who produce the food (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Ballantine & Creery, 2002; Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005).

As discussed, voluntary simplifiers tend to express a strong interest in community (Huneke, 2005). For some, this means opting to reside in an urban location where amenities are within walking distance (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). For others, it means

the sense of community, living with fewer fences, and sharing responsibilities with neighbors in a specific community (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002), as is the case within a collaborative housing community.

As socially conscious consumers, voluntary simplifiers embrace consumption values that likely align with supporting locally-owned retailers. A high level of interest in their communities, deep desire to change their consumption habits, and stronger connections with fewer purchases are all indicated in the literature. Thus, it is likely that voluntary simplifiers seek out locally-owned retailers as places where they can experience a connection to the business owner and the community, as well as access locally-made or sourced merchandise. Both males and females may be socially conscious consumers, however, the latter may be more inclined to consume out of socially conscious values or voluntary simplicity goals and will be discussed in the next section.

Gender and Socially Conscious Consumption

Bem (1981) notes “the distinction between male and female serves as a basic organizing principle for every human culture” (p. 354). Moreover, cultures assign roles based on gender and these roles are taught, reinforced, and often maintained through social learning (Bem, 1981). One of the many aspects of daily life that is gendered within most cultures is the division of labor within households, and within this division, consumption has historically been assigned to women (Sandlin & Maudlin, 2012). According to capitalistic ideology regarding the division of labor, women are perceived as consumers while men are viewed as producers (Slater, 1997). This ideological

discourse has inscribed meaning on women, and, more specifically, it has shaped the understanding society has of women as consumers as negative (DeLuca, 1999; Hall, 2000). Barbie, a doll that is adored by many and loathed by others, is just one example of how consumption is regarded as a gendered pursuit and may assist in reinforcing negative stereotypes (Steinberg, 2010). As Steinberg (2010) indicates “the marketing goal (of Barbie) was to tap into the supposed innate female desire to own as many clothes as possible” (p. 148) contributing to shaping the meaning of “female” to generations of girls, and perpetuating the idea of women as preoccupied with consumerism. However, such negative stereotypes seem to contradict some of the literature regarding the role of gender and socially conscious consumption.

While numerous inconsistencies have been revealed through decades of research on socially conscious consumers, one aspect has emerged as a commonality: strong environmental attitudes and intentions are more common among females versus males (e.g., La Roche, Bergeron, & Barbaro-Forleo, 2001; Mainieri, Barnett, Valdero, Unipan, & Oskamp, 1997; Roberts, 1990; Van Liere & Dunlap, 1968). For example, Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics, and Bohlen (2003) found that relationships between the most frequently hypothesized variables used to profile socially conscious consumers (gender, marital status, number of children, education, and social class) and attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors, found that not only are females more likely than males to hold strong environmental attitudes, but they are also the most likely to adopt more socially conscious shopping behaviors. Moreover, as Huneke (2005) found, women are more likely to identify with the voluntary simplicity lifestyle than men. Finally,

Noble, Griffith, and Adjei (2006) found that females demonstrate more loyalty to local businesses than males due to communal concerns and an interest in the stability of their communities.

Research has yet to fully explore this interesting disconnect between the stereotype of the shopaholic female and the tendency for socially conscious consumption and voluntary simplicity to emerge more often among females than males. Thus, an understanding of how gender plays a role in the decision to shop locally is needed. As each of these studies have highlighted, gender appears to be a relevant consideration for understanding the phenomenon of shopping locally, therefore, while male shoppers were not excluded from this study, as will be discussed in Chapter III, female shoppers comprised much of the focus of data collection.

Practices

In this section of the chapter, the third key theme, “practices,” is explained via the concepts of civic engagement, locally-owned businesses, and responsible capitalism. These concepts are examined through a review of the relevant literature. Additionally, discussion of each concept as an integral component of the shopping local phenomenon, particularly relative to the revitalization of downtowns, is included.

Civic Engagement

The term “civic engagement” has been used to describe numerous actions, ranging from social change, to political action, to volunteerism, with a variety of modifications based on usage. Definitions of civic engagement abound in the literature and are broad, with a precise definition of the term lacking. Adler and Goggin (2005)

described civic engagement as the wide range of activities that citizens may participate in for the purposes of helping to shape a community and improve conditions for those within it. Putnam (2001) defined civic engagement generally and includes informal social activities within the definition, focusing on any action that builds social capital, however, the author more explicitly suggested a number of ways in which individuals have exhibited civic *disengagement*. For example, Putnam (2001) proposed that declines in activities such as church attendance, voter turnout, and participation in committee service over the last several decades have all contributed to declining civic engagement in society. Delli-Carpini (1997) provided another broad description, referring to civic engagement as encompassing both individual and collective actions intended to identify and address issues that are of concern to the public. Diller (2001) provided yet another and again far-reaching definition of civic engagement by including “all activity related to personal and societal enhancement which results in improved human connection and human condition...experiencing a sense of connection, interrelatedness, and, naturally, commitment towards the greater community (all life forms)” (p. 22). Similarly, Ehrlich (2000) contends that,

A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate. (p. 26)

Each of the aforementioned definitions demonstrates the scope and breadth of the term *civic engagement*, and how emphasis of the term shifts depending on the author.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the concept of civic engagement as expressed by Adler and Goggin (2005) is used to refer to the many different behaviors which may contribute to communities specifically through acts of consumption, ultimately shaping the community and improving conditions for those within it. How civic engagement and consumption are related is discussed next.

Civic Engagement and Consumption

Consumption, when used as a form of civic engagement, could be considered an example of positive consumer activism. While it has been argued that civic duties and consumption are irreconcilable concepts (Johnston, 2007), in that consumption supposedly erodes civic life, it is possible that certain modes of consumption could be positively related to civic engagement (Nelson, Rademacher, & Paek, 2007). For example, the transformative potential of local consumption may engender civic relationships and aid in the revitalization of a city. Although it is inevitable that individuals will continue to consume throughout their lives, Arnould (2007) suggests that instead of attempting to escape the marketplace, consumers should attempt to engage with it for the purposes of progressive political action.

Indeed, it is possible that what occurs within the marketplace could impact the greater good. As Giddens (1991) suggests, what may be considered citizenship or civic engagement has not gone away, it has simply changed form and found new avenues, such as consumption. Scammell's (2000) thoughts on the topic highlight the connections between consumption and political action:

We are not talking here simply about groups of activists and progressive entrepreneurs at the margins, but the day-to-day activity of increasing millions of ordinary folk whose regular conduct of leisure and consumption has an ever-stronger political edge. (p. 352)

Scammell's (2000) comments highlight the shifting perceptions of what civic engagement is and how it can occur through ordinary acts, including consumption.

While some posit that consumption undermines civic life, Nelson, Rademacher, and Paek (2007) state that such an assertion "is too simplistic to truly capture the nuanced roles of consumption and civic life in contemporary society...individuals brought together around consumption acts can have a positive relationship with both consumption and civic life" (p. 153). According to the authors, civic engagement is related to socially conscious consumption, through a desire to create greater good for the community at large, and focusing on the meaning involved, rather than simply spending and having (Schor, 1998).

It is important to note that civic engagement through consumption is different from boycotts, which encourage people to purchase goods or services based on an established set of conditions, such as supporting specific companies or brands as a reward for behaving according to the beliefs of activists (Friedman, 1996). Instead, civic engagement through consumption offers a broader approach when compared to the more precise guidelines of a boycott. Based on the aforementioned definition of civic engagement by Adler and Goggin (2005), a suggested explanation of civic engagement specific to consumption would position consumption as a way to help shape the community and improve conditions for those in it through one's consumption choices.

The next section provides a discussion in relation to how civic engagement in the form of locally-owned businesses may help to achieve such goals.

Civic Engagement and Locally-Owned Businesses

According to Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson, and Nucci (2002), civic engagement is often integral to locally-owned business. The authors suggest that in addition to social and economic development, community and civic welfare is fostered through local businesses. Although the authors' investigation specifically relates to small-town America, it seems plausible that such concepts could extend to larger cities as well, and specifically their downtown neighborhoods. Tolbert et al. (2002) suggest a civic community perspective on the matter of locally-owned businesses, indicating that:

Locally oriented capitalism and civic engagement are the foundations of civic institutions that nurture trust and cooperation among citizens. This contributes to a vital capacity to solve problems and resolve local issues. Workers and owners/managers alike become embedded in localities and make decisions that benefit the community as well as themselves. Some of the beneficial local outcomes of community problem solving are evident in local civic welfare. (p. 92)

In summary, the authors propose that the social and economic aspects of community are not separate. Instead, they are interconnected, and if the civic community prospers, the local residents will as well.

Similarly, Tolbert, Lyson, and Irwin (1998) suggest that higher incomes, less income inequality, and lower rates of unemployment and poverty are all associated with civic engagement and locally-owned businesses. The authors indicate that civic society is related to socioeconomic well-being, and that local businesses may indeed be a key variable in determining which areas will flourish and which will decline (Tolbert et al,

1998). While the authors' findings shed more light on the topic, their examination is specific to small manufacturing firms, family farms, and civic-minded congregations, therefore, more research on the topic is needed. Another practice, responsible capitalism, and how it relates to the present study is addressed in the following section.

Responsible Capitalism

The term *responsible capitalism* has recently emerged, therefore, research on it does not abound in the academic literature. Additionally, while some might consider it contradictory to combine the words "responsible" and "capitalism," there are demands for ethical capitalism based on a broader set of values, thereby suggesting more responsibility and concern for both moral and ethical dimensions by integrating businesses and individuals (FIRST, 2014). Similar to terms like *social responsibility*, there are multiple understandings and interpretations of the term *responsible capitalism*. According to Keys, Malnight, and Stoklunkd (2013) responsible capitalism is more than pursuing shared value, it is:

Recognizing that business is an integral part of society and therefore has both the need and the responsibility to build strong, sustainable relationships with societies based on mutual benefit. It's not about purpose versus profit, because they are not mutually exclusive. (p. 3)

The authors indicate that responsible capitalism necessitates shifting the mindset of a business, which ultimately requires that it view itself "as part of society and not separate from it; where the focus is on the long term, not on quarterly earnings; where the needs of citizens and communities carry the same weight as those of shareholders" (p. 14). The

overall concept of responsible capitalism moves beyond shared value to center on shared responsibility.

FIRST, an International Affairs Organization, describes responsible capitalism as requiring “fundamental integration of the needs of the wider community, care for the communities in which the business operates” (para.1). Within the explanation of the term provided by FIRST, how a firm operates is important, for example, supporting initiatives that sustain the environment, the arts and culture through the firm’s goals and processes. When applied to this dissertation, responsible capitalism means that it is possible that local business owners perceive themselves to be an integral part of the community and consider the fate of their business and the fate of the community as one. Findings of this dissertation add depth and perspective to this newly emergent term by investigating the extent to which it frames relationships between local retailers and those who choose to shop at them within revitalized downtowns.

It is important to note that, with respect to the term *capitalism* and the concept of responsible capitalism, the focus is on the social relations pertinent to the concept, as opposed to political or power relations, such as race, class, and gender. That is, the focus centers on exploring how social relations, specifically those that foster support of locally-owned businesses, may offer a new take on how businesses can do good, thereby impacting the greater good of the whole community. The particular way that locally-owned businesses are interrelated with responsible capitalism is discussed next.

Locally-Owned Responsible Capitalism

While the term *local capitalism* suggests the notion of local production, for the purposes of this dissertation, locally-owned, responsible capitalism is applied to locally-owned businesses, including those that produce goods, such as craft brewers who brew their own beer, as well as those who are not producers and may be involved only in the selling of goods, such as a bookstore. While locally-owned businesses may not produce and sell their own goods, through their operations they facilitate the consumer's resistance to chain retailers, thereby benefitting the consumer and the community. The literature offers a few specific examples of independent producers, distributors, and retailers that are successfully changing marketplace behaviors in favor of smaller, local companies.

The first example is the emergence of the microbrewery phenomenon. Small, independent microbreweries have impacted major brewers (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000), not only by cutting into market share, but also by prompting large breweries to alter their product offerings in an attempt to recapture customers who seek craft beers. Historically, the brewing industry in the U.S. has been dominated by a few large firms, and as Porter (1980) described, it appeared to be a market with high entry barriers, specifically economies of scale in production and distribution. Consequently, until very recently it was considered to be a stable market environment dominated by a few companies. However, small local breweries have recently brought about significant changes. That is, the beer market has changed from one in which four brands held 80% of the total market share in the U.S. (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000) to a highly

fragmented and growing market with small breweries continuing to emerge throughout the country. Consumers became actively engaged with the marketplace by supporting small, locally-owned businesses in favor of national corporations, and in turn, disrupted the overall landscape of the beer market.

A second example of how consumers have changed the marketplace is through independent coffee shops. Independently-owned coffee shops have also exhibited similar propensities, not only in their situation as business competitors to global coffee shop brands, but in what they offer customers symbolically. As Thompson and Arsel (2004) describe, independently-owned coffee shops often position themselves as “David-like brands that can be interpreted as fighting a heroic battle against the corporate Goliaths of global capitalism. Smaller competitors have ample opportunity to profit from an explicitly anticorporate brand image” (p. 639). Both craft breweries and independent coffee shops illustrate how small, locally-owned businesses and proponents of such businesses can exist and even thrive because of how they are differentiated from global brands, as well as what this differentiation means to some consumers. The next section discusses the ways that civic engagement and locally-owned responsible capitalism merge to explain how locally-owned businesses benefit the community.

Civic Engagement and Locally-Owned Responsible Capitalism

For the purposes of this dissertation, the practice of shopping locally is posited as a form of civic engagement and locally-owned, responsible capitalism. According to Tolbert, Lyson, and Irwin (1998), retail establishments play pivotal roles in both concepts, by providing linkages within the community, and are frequently connected with

improving local economic conditions because they are embedded within the community, especially in revitalized downtowns. The authors suggest that networks between individuals and groups are vital for sustaining civil society within a community, in as much as owners of locally-owned retail establishments are likely to have a desire to better their communities and are more invested in the local communities than national retailers (Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson, & Nucci, 2002). In addition, as Tolbert et al. (2002) indicate, owners of small, locally-owned businesses often rely on each other as sources of information, therefore a more immediate sense of community may exist amongst them. Further, Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1994) have suggested that the link between civic engagement and local capitalism has an overall positive outcome for those involved.

According to Oldenburg (1989) one more way that local retail establishments may build community is through their position as “third places.” As discussed earlier in this chapter, third places are establishments that become informal gathering places within the community (Oldenburg, 1989), by becoming embedded within the community and increasing local business patronage and civic engagement. Indeed, findings of Tolbert, Lyson, and Irwin (1998) indicated that small-scale businesses create more benefits for a larger number of people, as they expand and help the community to grow due to their embeddedness within it.

Civic engagement through locally-owned capitalism in small towns and rural communities has been the topic of some examination in literature (e.g., Besser, 2009; Tolbert, Iriwn, Lyson, & Nucci, 2002). However, much less is known about the significance of civic engagement on the part of retailers and their customers, specifically

among locally-owned stores in revitalized downtown areas. As Blanchard, Irwin, Tolbert, Lyson, and Nucci (2003) revealed, the consequences of social decline in areas without retail, and in particular, the impact of small retailers, prior to this study, was a topic that had yet to be examined in depth. In the next section, the role of these concepts in the study of locally-owned stores, their customers, and their communities is examined through the conceptual lens of practice theory.

Conceptual Framework

In this section, discussion of how the conceptual pieces come together to provide the framework for this study is provided. I begin with an overview of practice theory and how the theory helps to form the framework for this study. Next, the three areas of literature reviewed in this chapter, (1) *place*, (2) *people*, and (3) *practices* are discussed to specify how practice theory explains the ways that each of these concepts fit together and form the framework that facilitates the study of shopping local. This is followed by a discussion of how the guiding research questions are used to address the purpose and objectives of this dissertation.

Practice Theory

Practice theory, as described by Ortner (2006), is a theory of how social beings, each with their own diverse motives and intentions, create and transform the world in which they live. Southerton (2013) indicates that practice theory is used to examine everyday routines or habits, and considers them as observable social practices, rather than mundane activities. According to Warde (2005), there is no single authority on theories of practice. Per Reckwitz (2002), a “practice” is considered something that is routinized

behavior, with many interconnected elements contributing to it, including both physical and mental actions. Practice theory is closely associated with several theorists, including the work of Bourdieu, Giddens, Foucault, and Schatzki. The foundation of practice theory comes from Bourdieu's (1977) work on habitus, which involves internalizing the social order. Giddens (1979) developed a theory on "structuration," describing how the notion of order can be produced and reproduced with practice, rather than through society. Similar to Bourdieu, and as Postill (2010) explains, French theorist Michele Foucault considered that it is discipline, which has been forced upon individuals, that provides structure, and therefore power has created routinized practices within individuals. Last, another theorist credited with contributing to the overall understanding and formation of practice theory is Schatzki (1996), who suggested an alternate theory of individuals simply doing what makes sense to them and that individuals create a hierarchy of these "sensibly founded" activities.

As Halkier, Katz-Gerro, and Martens (2011) suggest, practice theory is applied to understanding circumstances surrounding the routines or practices that are carried out in everyday life. Thus, the theory has recently been considered in relation to the study of consumption. Sociologist Alan Warde (2005) applies practice theory to consumption through the idea that a practice is "a process whereby agents engage in appropriating and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion" (p. 137). Consumption is an act that repeatedly offers the individual opportunities to devote attention to a practice. Shopping, as Zelizer

(2005) suggests, means that consumers are not simply selecting items, but that they are truly doing something, such as taking a stand for what they believe in.

As Warde (2005) contends, practices require more comprehensive attention to contemplate the broader social interactions and relations, such as contemplating why and how individuals shop at locally-owned stores. Moreover, consumption allows one to internalize a practice, to evolve regarding the level of involvement with a practice, or to change his or her practices. For this reason, practice theory has been used more recently to address sustainable consumption (e.g., Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Hargreaves, 2011; Sahakian & Wilhite, 2013). For the purposes of this dissertation, practice theory is applied to understand the significance of local shopping, in terms of shop owners who have decided to set up stores in a downtown area, consumers who choose to shop locally at these stores, and ultimately, in terms of how these decisions may impact a revitalized downtown.

Warde (2005) suggests that internalizing a practice to the point that it changes comes as a result of involvement with three components: (1) understanding, (2) procedural, and (3) engagement with the practice. In terms of the first concept, for consumers understanding refers to their understanding of the importance and impact of their consumption behaviors. For store owners, understanding refers to the significance that their stores' presence offers the downtown area and customers. In terms of the second component, the procedural aspect for consumers means mentally connecting their consumption behaviors to the downtown area, such as mindfully choosing to support the retailers located there. For store owners, the procedural component may be perceiving

their presence as a way to offer the community a consumption choice via a local organization, as opposed to a chain store. In terms of Warde's (2005) third component, engagements with the practice, for consumers, this would be the depth of their engagement and commitment to the practice, and in this case, shopping locally. For store owners, the engagement may be purely monetary, or the engagement may come from a deep-seated desire to serve the community. Finally, Warde (2005) suggests that the physical actions of carrying out the activities is what "actualizes and sustains" practices.

According to Ortner (2006), practice theory "seeks to explain the relationship(s) that are acquired between human action, on the one hand, and some global entity which we call 'the system' on the other" (p. 128). Ortner, an anthropologist, implies that people have the ability to change the world through their deeply held, fundamental beliefs and values, as it is through these beliefs and values that change occurs. Within the context of consumption, practice theory can be useful in considering how individuals act to change the world around them, such as their local downtown areas, through their consumption habits. Consumers and store owners alike have the ability to change the community, and according to practice theory, change occurs through the relationships that are developed. These relationships include those that consumers may develop with locally-owned stores and with the downtown area. Likewise, store owners may develop relationships with consumers as well as with other store owners within the downtown area.

When viewed through the lens of practice theory, consumption provides some type of reward, usually both internal and external (Warde, 2005). For example, consumers may be required to exert more effort to visit their local downtown and may be

rewarded with not just a material object, but with feeling as though they are contributing to the existence of a locally-owned store and supporting the downtown area. Similarly, for store owners, the success of their locally-owned stores may reward them financially, while internally they may be rewarded by the knowledge that their businesses are helping to sustain the downtown area and to provide a more unique shopping environment for customers. According to Warde (2005), the more effort involved in or complex the practice, the greater the internal reward.

Practices convey information to others, such that those familiar with them will recognize and decipher related signals, whereas those unfamiliar with them will not (Warde, 2005). Practice theory is useful for investigating and understanding how practices change (Halkier, Katz-Gerro, & Martens, 2011). For example, Hargreaves (2011) extends this to social relations and social processes, as in the author's investigation of changes in pro-environmental behavior, specifically challenging waste behaviors in an office environment. Finally, everyday consumers may be engaging in socially conscious practices through routine practices such as shopping and these practices may hold meaning for them (Connolly & Prothero, 2008).

While some socially conscious consumers may value shopping locally and commit a great deal of time and effort to the endeavor, others may value it less, and therefore practice it less frequently and with less fervor. In the same vein, some locally-owned retailers may strongly consider their contributions to the community and be very committed to the revitalization of a downtown, while others may have set up shop in that location for other reasons and have less involvement in the surrounding community.

Investigating local shopping through the lens of practice theory offers insight into how the phenomenon reflects and is reflected in socially conscious consumption choices and behaviors. The ways that the three substantive areas, *Place*, *People* and *Practices* relate to practice theory and are interrelated are discussed next.

Integration of the Concepts

The conceptual framework used for this dissertation integrates the three main areas of literature and thought discussed in the previous sections: *Place*, *People*, and *Practices*. In this section, I discuss how the combination of these three areas create the framework for this dissertation and how the pieces coalesce to shape the outcome, which is to investigate the motivations for and meanings of shopping locally. Then, a discussion of the guiding research questions that are used to address the purpose and objectives of the study is provided.

The topic of local shopping has received very little attention in the literature. Specifically, considering how the three concepts of *Place*, *People*, and *Practices* combine to offer an in-depth understanding of shopping locally has not been explained thus far. As presented in Figure 1, each of these concepts and their interrelationships are considered through the lens of practice theory, a theory that seeks to understand the motivations of individuals engaged in seeking to improve the world through their practices, including consumption (Ortner, 2006). The three concepts designated within the framework each encompass aspects that are integral to the overall understanding of shopping locally. Therefore, each relationship is detailed in the following paragraphs,

offering an explanation of how they connect and contribute to the overall conceptual framework.

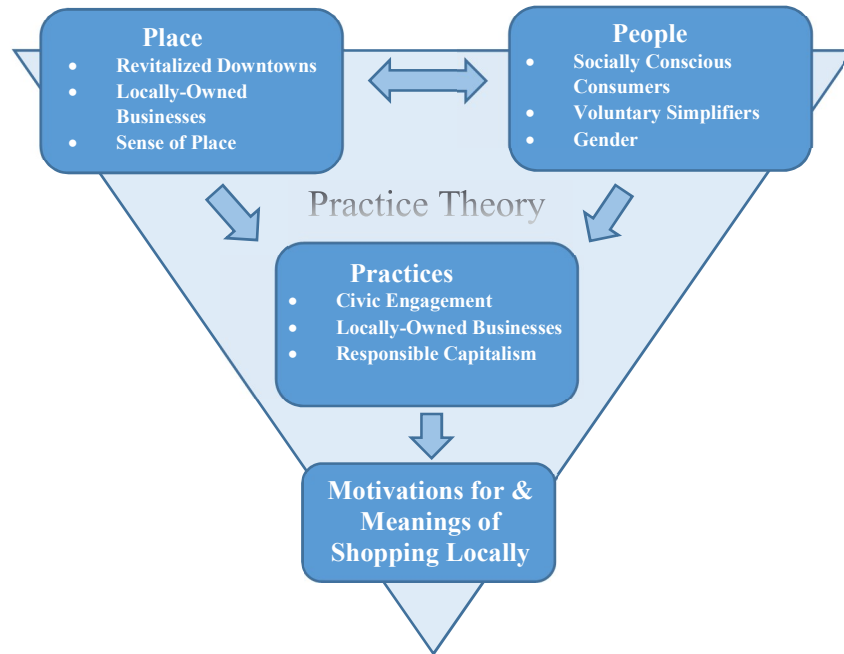


Figure 1. Integration of the Three Key Concepts

Place and People

The conceptual framework for this dissertation begins with the connection between place and people, as depicted in Figure 2, and as considered through the lens of practice theory.

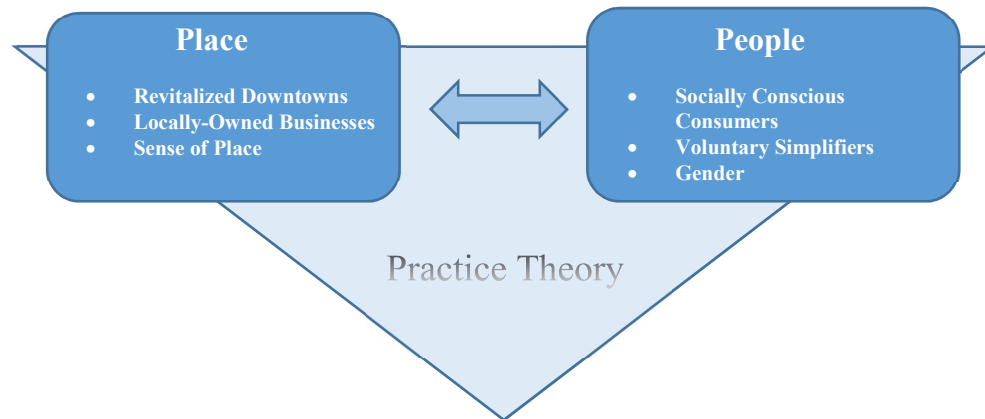


Figure 2. Relationships Between Place and People

According to the literature, some consumers desire more connection to their community (Loyer, 2015). Socially conscious consumers in particular feel that they have an influence on the market and hope to impact the community through their consumption habits (Webster, 1975). Likewise, voluntary simplifiers feel they wield much power over their consumption behaviors and value involvement and social ties within the community (Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Huneke, 2005). The literature also indicates that women are the most likely to hold similar attitudes and adopt socially conscious shopping behaviors, as well as share more concern for local businesses (Noble, Griffith, & Adjei, 2006). Thus, it is possible that female consumers who are socially conscious and interested in simplifying may be motivated to shop where there is a greater sense of place, such as revitalized downtowns (Faulk, 2006). This is because revitalized downtowns offer consumers more opportunities for connecting with the community and bringing people together (Mitchell, 2007). Moreover, locally-owned retail businesses are often embedded within the community (Mitchell, 2007) providing not only unique products but

engendering social ties within the community (Cohen, 2007). Locally-owned businesses in a revitalized downtown connect people to place through the concept of sense of place, a powerful bond people have with places (Brocato, Baker, & Voorhees, 2015), and one that people may experience when shopping in a downtown area (Faulk, 2006).

Practice theory is integral to the conceptual framework as it offers theoretical insight into how the relationships depicted in the model are influenced by a desire to improve the community. In this dissertation, practice theory helps explain the underlying motives of people who, through their practices, support places like locally-owned retail businesses in a revitalized downtown.

Place and Practices

The connection between place and practices, as indicated in Figure 3, suggests that relationships with a place leads to specific practices when viewed through the lens of practice theory.

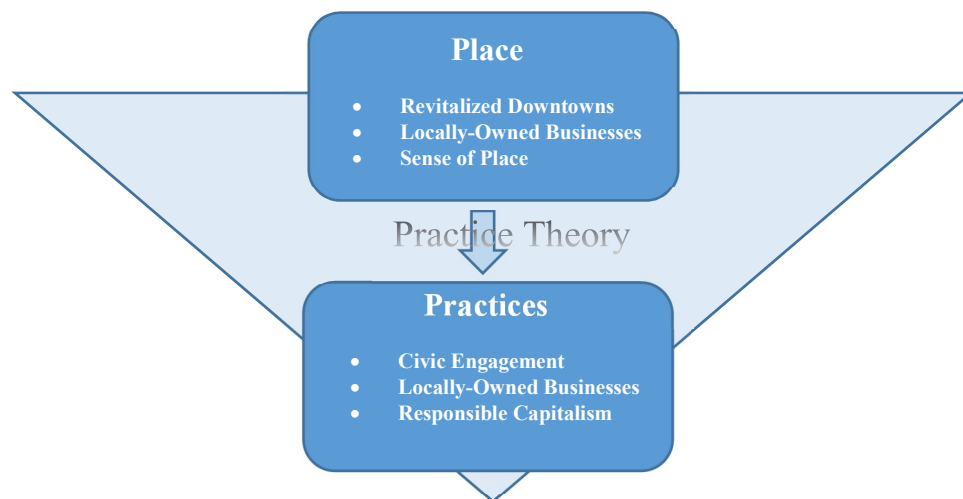


Figure 3. Relationships Between Place and Practices

Manzo and Perkins (2006) found that place-based attachment can be critical for supporting a community. Thus, in this dissertation I investigate how such place-based attachment may be exhibited through practices, specifically civic engagement and responsible capitalism relative to locally-owned businesses. Civic engagement can emerge through consumption (Nelson, Rademacher, & Paek, 2007), including consumption in support of locally-owned businesses. Likewise, the practice of operating a locally-owned business is a form of place-based attachment because these businesses are not only embedded in the community, but give back to the local community in substantial ways (Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin, 1998). Moreover, responsible capitalism is connected to place, as the concept situates business as an integral part of society and one with a responsibility to consider the well-being of the broader community with a long-term focus (Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin, 1998; What is Responsible Capitalism, 2014). In sum, each aspect of Practices, as described here, can be articulated through a connection to a place, and in the case of this dissertation, the place is a revitalized downtown broadly, or more specifically, a particular locally-owned business.

People and Practices

As highlighted in Figure 4, practice theory supports the connection of people (socially conscious consumers, voluntary simplifiers, and gender) to practices (civic engagement, locally-owned businesses, and responsible capitalism). As practice theory posits, it is through routinized habits, or practices, that people can make positive changes to the world (Ortner, 2006). Specifically, socially conscious consumers and voluntary simplifiers are the focus of the present study because the literature suggests that they

desire to help others through their consumption practices (Huneke, 2005; Webster, 1975). Further, it is possible that gender plays a role in consumer decisions to engage in socially conscious consumption and voluntary simplicity. The practices included in this investigation, such as civic engagement, owning and shopping at locally-owned businesses, and responsible capitalism, are all channels that individuals may use to exhibit a deep sense of responsibility toward the greater good (Micheletti, 2003).

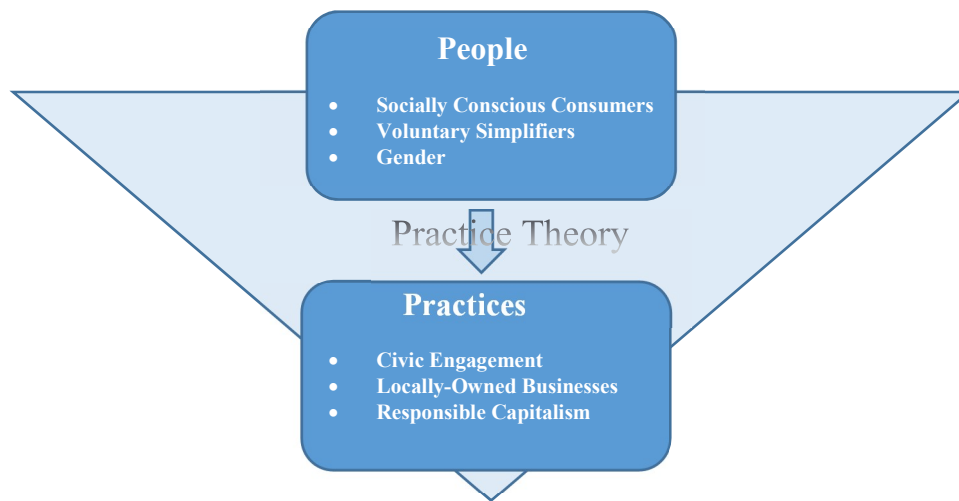


Figure 4. Relationship Between People and Practices

As depicted in the conceptual model (page 68) the ultimate goal of investigating the relationships between people, places, and practices is to develop an in-depth understanding of the motivations for and meanings of shopping locally. Framing this investigation through practice theory positions these relationships to be explored in-depth and examined in relation to the purpose and objectives of the study. That is, the integration of these concepts via practice theory facilitates a better understanding of the

phenomenon of shopping local, both from the perspective of consumers as well as business owners, and specific to the context of a revitalized downtown area.

Guiding Research Questions

As introduced in the beginning of this chapter, the three objectives of this study are: (1) to explore the reasons why consumers choose to shop locally in revitalized downtowns, (2) to investigate the reasons why store owners choose to operate within the revitalized downtown, and (3) to consider the implications of shopping locally within the revitalized downtown context for the broader community. In this section, I explore how these objectives are addressed by the conceptual framework, specifically through questions emerging from the literature that were used to guide the research.

Objective One: Reasons for Shopping Local

The first objective of this dissertation is to explore the reasons why consumers choose to shop locally. It is important to understand why consumers choose to shop at locally-owned stores. Given that locally-owned stores tend to differ in their daily operations and business practices from those of chain retailers, and that more money from locally-owned establishments goes back to the local community (Stebbins, 2014) it is important to understand what compels consumers to support these establishments. To address this objective, one guiding research question is: *What does shopping local mean for consumers?* To this end, data collection focused on how consumers perceive shopping local and the significance that they attribute to this practice.

Taking into consideration that attachment to a physical place contributes to the concept of sense of place (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004), and that the distinctiveness of

downtown areas likely makes them attractive (Faulk, 2006), it is important to understand how sense of place contributes to shopping local in a revitalized downtown. Therefore, a second guiding research question is: *What makes shopping locally in the downtown area distinctive for consumers?* To address this guiding research question, the data collection explored how sense of place shapes the consumer's experience with shopping locally.

Objective Two: Reasons for Store Ownership

The second objective of this dissertation is to consider the perspective of business owners who have set up shop in the downtown area. As previously noted, revitalized downtown areas can create a competitive advantage for retailers by differentiating the area from other, less distinctive shopping areas (Warnaby, 2013). Thus, the uniqueness of the downtown area may prompt consumers to linger, and in turn, positively impact the businesses in these areas. Therefore, a guiding research question developed to address this objective is: *What is the appeal of a downtown area for local retail store owners?* Data collection efforts focused on the benefits and drawbacks of selecting a downtown location to establish a retail business.

Similarly, it is possible that business owners provide more than just products and services by operating in these locations, as a shared fate and link to the community have been noted when businesses are involved with the community (Besser & Miller, 2004). Investigating locally-owned retail businesses provides a better understanding of the significance of the interrelationships between retail stores, consumers, and revitalized downtowns. Thus, a second guiding research question to address the motivations of business owners is: *In what ways do retail stores and store owners help build community*

within a revitalized downtown? To this end, data collection focused on the interactions of store owners with their customers, as well as their perceptions of the broader impact of their businesses.

Objective Three: Meaning of Shopping Locally for the Community

The third objective of this dissertation is to examine the implications of shopping locally for the broader community. According to the literature, local establishments benefit a community in ways such as increasing quality of life and civic engagement of citizens, as well as aiding in problem-solving for the local area (Tolbert, 2005). To this end, I explored the benefits derived from the presence of locally-owned businesses in the downtown area. I posited that through the efforts of locally-owned businesses and the consumers who support them, the broader community will benefit through revitalization of a once forgotten area. Thus, a guiding research question is: *In what ways do locally-owned businesses aid in the revitalization of a downtown area?* To address this question, data collection efforts focused on community members' perceptions of the key contributors to revitalization efforts in the downtown area.

Similarly, local capitalism contributes to the economic well-being of an area, and to the social and cultural progress of a community (Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin, 1998). To explore the cultural and social value of locally-owned businesses in the downtown, the second guiding research question is: *What factors contribute to the development of community within a downtown area?* To address this guiding research question, data collection methods allowed for investigation of the social and economic ties between store owners, shoppers, and the downtown area. To summarize, this study offers an in-

depth investigation of the meanings and motivations of people involved with shopping locally and the benefits that emerge for the community at large.

Summary

In this chapter I provided an overview of the literature relevant to the topic of this dissertation. Specifically, the three key themes of place, people, and practices were examined via the literature and used to frame the purpose and objectives. Gaps were highlighted and examined relative to the goals of this dissertation. In the next chapter, the methodological framework and the methods used to collect data are explained.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the phenomenon of shopping locally from the perspective of the consumer and the store owner and within the context of a revitalized downtown. Three key objectives were developed to address this purpose: (1) to explore the reasons why consumers choose to shop locally in revitalized downtowns, (2) to investigate the reasons why store owners choose to operate within the revitalized downtown, and (3) to consider the implications of shopping locally within the revitalized downtown context for the broader community.

As discussed in Chapter II, this study helps to fill several gaps in existing research because, while there are many studies that explore consumer behavior relative to socially conscious consumption, little is known about consumers who choose to support local retailers and business owners by shopping locally. Likewise, there is little available research on the topic of retail store ownership in revitalized downtown areas.

As discussed in Chapter I, an interpretive research design was used to address the purpose of the study. In this chapter, an explanation of the research methodology used in this dissertation is provided. I begin with an overview of interpretive methodology, followed by discussion of the specific ethnographic approaches I employed. Next, the specific methods I used to collect data are discussed in detail. Finally, an overview of the approach to data analysis and interpretation is provided. Also included is a discussion of

how my own position as a consumer who shops at locally-owned retailers in this downtown area required reflexive data collection and an iterative analysis process. Such an approach allowed for the most thorough interpretation of data, while facilitating representation of the participants' experiences throughout the process. The research design employed in this dissertation is discussed next.

Ethnographic Methods as Interpretive Inquiry

An ethnographic research design was used to address the purpose and objectives of the study. According to Blumer (1966), interpretive approaches such as ethnography allow the researcher to grasp the essence of group life, as these approaches focus on the understanding of lived experiences (Merriam, 1998). One advantage of using the ethnographic approach in particular is that it allows for consideration of sensory details such as sights, sounds, smells, and can even include the tone of events while portraying relationships and responses (Emerson, 1995). Ethnography reveals the social power of an activity and the meaning this activity holds for those involved (Wacquant, 2005). Finally, an ethnographic approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of a given topic and allows for a wide array of data collection methods, from formal and informal interviews, to participant observation and visual documentation. Each method offers a means to examine the social meanings created and used by a specific social or cultural group (Van Maanen, 1982).

An ethnographic approach focuses on understanding the lives of others by putting oneself in their settings, also known as the "field" (Goffman, 2002). As the researcher enters the field, connections and relationships are made which provide an opportunity for

more intimate knowledge of the situation, as well as a deep familiarity with the experiences of the situation and the meanings these experiences hold for individuals (Goffman, 2002). As will be discussed next, I spent eight weeks immersed in a multi-site examination, both online and in person, of locally-owned establishments in the revitalized downtown area of one city located in the Southeastern United States. This approach provided an opportunity to gain a deep understanding of those who are engaged in the downtown community by their efforts to support locally-owned retail establishments. A comprehensive description of data collection methods is provided next.

Data Collection Methods

Interpretive inquiry emerged from the ontological belief that multiple realities exist (Merriam, 1998). To capture the meaning of these realities, ethnography, as an interpretive approach to research, employs several types of data collection methods. As discussed briefly in Chapter I, I used a multi-site approach to collect data. Specifically, I observed nine locally-owned downtown establishments, both in person and online during the two-month period that I was in the field.

Defining the Field

As with all research, boundaries must be defined in order to collect data in a systematic manner. In this study, I selected a mid-sized city in the southeastern United States where the downtown has been undergoing revitalization for more than a decade (Killian, 2013). The city has a population of 285,342 according to the United States Census Bureau (2017), and the economy in this city specializes in manufacturing,

wholesale trade, and educational services. The median household income in this city is \$45,064 (United States Census Bureau, 2017). Specifically, I began by identifying an area of the downtown specifically conducive to the goals of the study. This area, Oak Street and the adjoining blocks are important because it offers a concentration of retail businesses. I then selected a total of 9 sites for further observation. These sites were selected given the literature on shopping local and on downtown revitalization. The following offers a description of each site as well as rationale for inclusion. Within the downtown area, the field sites included: a coffee shop, three boutiques, an independent bookseller, a brewery, a yarn and fiber art supply store, an antique store, and an art gallery. The coffee shop has existed in the downtown area for fifteen years, serving coffee and pastries and providing a place for meetings, working, and a platform for selling artwork by local artists. Due to the longevity of this establishment in the downtown area, and range of activities offered, the coffee shop appeared to be an ideal fit for this study.

The first boutique selected for data collection is a specialty store that sells unique jewelry, handbags, women's clothing and home décor items, many of which are handcrafted and made locally. Items are priced as low as \$5 to more than \$100. This boutique sells locally-crafted and fair trade products typically not found in chain stores, thereby positioning the boutique as a good fit given the goals of this study. The next selected boutique offers a variety of products geared mostly towards men, including bags, shoes, denim and leather goods, along with apothecary products. The second boutique was selected because it offered a very different experience from the first as many of the

products sold in this store tend to be offered at much higher price points, for example jeans are priced at around \$300 per pair. The third boutique selected for this study was the newest retail store within the downtown at the time of data collection. This boutique carries a mix of new and vintage items ranging from vintage clothing, furniture and housewares to new jewelry, artwork, and gift items crafted by artisans in the Southeastern US. It appeared to be a good fit for this study as it caters to a wide variety of shopping tastes and because it is new to the area was likely to attract shoppers.

The independent bookstore selected for observation offers a relatively small selection of books when compared to a chain bookstore, and features carefully curated displays with handwritten signage, alongside other items such as journals, calendars and a few toys. There is also a café that serves coffee and a small lunch and dinner menu, in addition to beer and wine, as part of the bookstore. The bookstore appeared to be a good field site, as it has many tables and chairs scattered around the store and café area where groups or individuals may spend time. Moreover, the store hosts numerous events that provide opportunities for observation.

The brewery chosen as a field site for this study brews beer on-site and sells its beers alongside a few wine selections and other non-alcoholic beverages. The brewery provides a large space with many seating options for people to congregate and relax. This particular brewery is one of three breweries within the downtown area, but it has been open the longest and attracts everyone from families to happy hour crowds, also hosting a variety of community events.

The antique store selected as a field site was chosen because it is one of the few remaining antique dealers within the downtown, an area that was once occupied by numerous antique stores. The antiques range from furniture and décor to kitchen gadgets, and toys, to name just a few. This store has a garage door front window that is often kept open, inviting shoppers into the space and providing excellent observation opportunities.

Similarly, the art gallery chosen as an observation site is one of the few remaining galleries on a block within the downtown where numerous art galleries once existed. This gallery regularly hosts artists and participates in downtown events throughout the year.

The last location within the downtown area that I observed is a locally-owned yarn and fiber art supply store. This store sells fiber art materials as well as hosts classes and offers an open space for knitting and crocheting groups on the weekend. Such activities offered the opportunity for me to engage with the customers in the natural store setting.

As Malinowski (1922) indicates, within the ethnographic approach, both concrete data as well as more abstract information, such as conversations and observations, must be collected in a detailed and systematic manner in order to be useful. Concrete data may be connected and charted to show interrelationships between people, places and events, while abstract information and behaviors may depict more details and nuances that would typically go unnoticed if not for observation. While in the field, I talked to shoppers as well as store owners, to seek a more robust understanding of the overall “shop local” experience. The inclusion of a variety of establishments, as mentioned above, allowed

me to interpret a constellation of consumption opportunities within the field, rather than focusing on just one type of store or a single establishment. The specific data collection methods used in this dissertation are detailed next.

Participant Observation and Fieldnotes

Fieldwork involves actively going into a place or an environment so that one may observe events and actions occurring naturally, as a part of everyday life. As Emerson (1995) suggested, observation often includes actively participating instead of just sitting back and taking formal notes. Using observation “the researcher may come to see deep theoretical relevance in a mundane experience or practice” (Emerson, 1995, p. 19). Observation allows for the researcher to record what is happening in the moment, taking in the physical setting of the field site, noting who is participating in activities and interacting, observing both conversations and pauses as well as perceiving subtle nuances that might not be revealed just by interviewing individuals (Merriam, 1998). Because fieldwork allows for multiple perspectives to be investigated, it simultaneously offers a multifaceted interpretation of an experience or phenomenon.

Through participant observation, while in the field I observed as many settings and activities as possible to capture the behaviors of owners, employees, and customers as they were in the moment while interacting as part of the setting. My observations were based on Merriam’s (1998) checklist of elements to consider, which encompass the physical setting of each field site. Specifically, I noted the layout of the space, how the space is typically used, and how the space is filled (see Appendix A: Observation Template). In shops and boutiques I observed how and where the merchandise is

displayed, cash register locations, fitting rooms, as well as window displays and signage located in and around the stores. In coffee shops and breweries, I again observed the physical layout, considering the location where customers order, pay for and pick up beverages as well as the placement of seating, entrances or exits, restrooms and any other spaces within the establishment.

Second, as suggested by Merriam (1998), the people at each site, including the number of people within the spaces, their locations and roles as well as characteristics that help to explain them were observed. For example, in the brewery and the coffee shop, I observed who and how many individuals were working during each observation and the activities they appeared to be engaging in, as well as any customers in the establishment and their activities and conversations.

Third, Merriam (1998) indicates that activities and interactions occurring within individual field sites should also be noted, such as relationships that appear to exist between individuals, and the nature of activities occurring within the spaces (e.g. browsing or purchasing behaviors, exchanges between owners and employees or customers). In boutiques, for example, shop owners were often offering assistance with purchases or carrying on casual conversations with employees while re-stocking merchandise. All of these are activities that I observed. In the brewery, for example, I observed interactions between employees and customers seated at the bar, as well as activities the bartender was undertaking, such as washing glasses while chatting with customers.

Fourth, the conversations taking place within each setting were also observed. I noted who was conversing, including who was doing the talking versus the listening, as well as made note of any non-verbal cues that were discernable from the conversations through body language or expressions. Again, such elements of the space are recommended by Merriam (1998) to consider during observation. In shops and boutiques, conversations were often brief exchanges of pleasantries, while in the coffee shop and brewery more drawn out exchanges occurred.

Finally, the last of Merriam's (1998) recommendations are to take note of the subtle dynamics occurring within each field site. For example, any informal activities taking place within the spaces were also noted, including groups who were gathering in the space, such as a meeting occurring in the coffee shop, or discussions that owners and employees had with delivery persons unloading boxes, as well as the day-to-day activities within a shop, such as unpacking and displaying stock. Conversely, anything that was absent but might be expected within a space was also observed. For example, store owners who failed to greet or acknowledge customers or customers coming into a coffee shop or brewery and not ordering anything were also activities I made note of.

As the researcher, my own actions, conversations, and my role within each field site were noted as part of the site, in as much as they have an influence on the dynamics of the site. Each of these aspects combined provided structure to my observations and allowed me to develop a working knowledge of the naturally occurring consumption activities and experiences of local shoppers within the retail and service spaces. Furthermore, integrating all of these elements provided an opportunity to compare and

contrast information for further clarification and interpretation once data were being analyzed (Goffman, 2002).

It should be noted that my role as a researcher within each site was as both researcher and participant. As Gans (1999) describes, while in the role of researcher-participant I am one who participates, yet is only partially involved, so that research may still be conducted. I allowed myself to learn and see the experience as those I was studying might see them, as I actively researched and participated within each field site. For example, the amount of engagement between a store owner and their customers and the types of interactions they had with them are experiences that I observed and experienced, as researcher and participant.

Emerson (1995) noted that with ethnography what is observed and what becomes data are not two separate entities, but may be considered “inscriptions of social life and discourse” (p. 8). To this end, fieldnotes are generally used as the primary method of capturing observation data in the field. According to Burgess (1982), there are three basic types of field notes: *substantive*, *methodological*, and *analytic*. As Burgess (1982) indicates, substantive notes include the main observations the researcher makes while in the field. For example, the location, the names of people involved, the date and the title of the event that is being observed. Methodological field notes consist of the personal impressions regarding what is being observed and the researcher’s own involvement in the activities. These notes serve as a reflective tool, where I, the researcher, noted why I approached particular individuals (Burgess, 1982). Last, analytic notes are key for

consideration of the themes or topics that need to be explored further or were developed based on what was observed (Burgess, 1982).

While I was in the aforementioned sites, the first type of field notes, substantive notes, were collected by openly jotting notes. I consciously situated myself as an unobtrusive researcher attempting to ensure accuracy while still considering the comfort and the appropriateness of the situation (Emerson, 1995). The benefit to such a writing style was that others came to see the behavior as normal and therefore it allowed me, the researcher, the ability to write throughout the experience. There were instances when field notes were written in private or when I deemed it inappropriate to write openly, but most of the time I took notes as events were unfolding.

In addition to the substantive notes, I kept a separate journal during my time in the field in which I took methodological notes (Malinowski, 1967). In this journal I was noting my own experiences with and personal impressions of what I observed within the field. I also noted what motivated me to select different participants and any relationships with participants in the field. As Burgess (1982) indicates, as the researcher, methodological notes gave me the opportunity to reflect on what I was observing relative to the overall study and how these reflections related to what I was encountering in the field.

Lastly, analytic field notes were also collected to assist in providing early stage analysis of what was observed within the field (Burgess, 1982). This type of field notes assisted me with uncovering themes that were emerging within the data and helped me to grasp the topics that allowed for further analysis and development within the research

study. Theoretical issues and thematic patterns were noted as they emerged through the data.

Typically, what is written in the field represents both observations and inscriptions of experiences that are observed at each field site. While at each site, I did not look for one specific action or interaction, but observed the breadth of activities and occurrences, providing the freedom to write without restrictions about what I saw and was able to identify meaning as it emerged. Further, my field notes consisted of both substantive and reflective data, as Burgess (1982) suggests, with the former detailing more of the concrete information such as locations, times and actions, and the latter providing the opportunity to consider my own thoughts and ideas related to the experiences. Finally, as Lofland and Lofland (1984) indicate, at the end of each day in the field, handwritten substantive and analytic field notes were typed in full to fill in the gaps of any jottings, and provide a running chronological log of events and experiences from the day.

Interviews

While I compiled much of my data through field notes, there were behaviors that I was not privy to simply through observation (Merriam, 1998). Thus, interviews afforded me the opportunity to gain more information about behaviors that were not openly observable, and allowed me to develop a deeper perspective and understanding of the phenomenon from the viewpoint of those in the setting. While unstructured and more casual conversations with a purpose (Merriam, 1998), known as field interviews, were collected as data in the field, I also conducted in-depth interviews with both shoppers and

owners of local establishments. The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews was to provide a more in-depth understanding of the participants and their experiences in their own words as they told their stories (McCracken, 1988).

According to Merriam (1998), interviews can generally be classified on three levels: (1) highly structured, where the questions are predetermined and the format may resemble a verbal survey; (2) semi-structured, which utilizes a mix of both pre-determined questions and more free-flowing conversation; and (3) un-structured, which is the most exploratory and conversational of the three. The in-depth interviews that I conducted were semi-structured, in that, while some questions were pre-determined, many were worded in a flexible manner, allowing for the participant to define his or her experiences according to how each interpreted the question asked. This approach also allowed for questions to evolve throughout the conversation, in keeping with the naturalistic setting of ethnography. In addition, in-depth interviews allowed an opportunity for clarification of the participants' responses and to dig deeper into observations from the field. I noted not only what was said, but the body language and expressions that accompanied the verbal information, as this was key to further understanding their responses (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In-depth and field interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and were conducted in locations that were convenient and familiar to the participants for their comfort. After the interviews, all recordings were transcribed verbatim. Following each interview, I also wrote my reflections with any added thoughts that were useful for data analysis, per Merriam's (1998) suggestion.

For this dissertation, I conducted interviews with three groups of participants: (1) store owners and employees, (2) shoppers, and (3) downtown partnership organizations and/or Chamber of Commerce representatives. Each store owner/employee was interviewed on at least two separate occasions: once at the beginning of the data collection period and again at the closing of the data collection period. This approach allowed me to gather initial information, and then, as the weeks passed I was able to formulate further questions for each owner based on what I observed and experienced during my time in the field. Additionally, brief and informal field interviews were also conducted with some store owners and employees throughout the data collection process.

As I developed relationships within each location, I talked with shoppers who visited the sites in the field. Field interviews with these individuals were brief and occurred on-the-spot, composed of only a few questions, lasting from five to ten minutes. At other times, individuals who were open to longer interviews allowed me to probe more in-depth into their local shopping behaviors and their interest in supporting the downtown community. Each in-depth interview lasted between thirty and ninety minutes.

Interviews with Chamber of Commerce and downtown partnership organization representatives were also conducted. These interviews allowed me to gain added perspective on the development and revitalization efforts specific to the downtown area, as well as their experiences with working with locally-owned businesses.

Visual Documentation

To fully capture the essence of the local shopping phenomenon, photographs were also used as a method of data collection. As Peñaloza and Cayla (2006) note, the use of photographs can help ensure that the ethnographic researcher is better able to capture and recall the experience, as photos assist in evoking memories of the field and can even help to reconstruct moments in time. Specific to topics related to consumption, Peñaloza and Cayla (2006) posit that photographs can provide cues for understanding the spaces in which consumption takes place, as well as different behaviors of consumers within these spaces. Moreover, the use of photographs provides a more complete and holistic view of the spaces in which consumption practices occur (Peñaloza & Cayla, 2006). In sum, the use of photographs was beneficial to ethnographic data collection, as photographs were used to visually document places, illustrate how spaces change, or just helped to tell a story, thereby providing a richer context for the experiences under study.

I photographed each of the observation sites, including both interiors and exteriors. Specifically, I captured the layout of each location, including the merchandise offered and the fixtures used to display merchandise within them. Similarly, I photographed public spaces in the downtown area including parks, seating areas, public art displays and the like. The photographs provided information regarding the setting for each of the locations and provided cues as to the atmosphere of each business, including signage and promotions as “everyday life” occurring within the spaces over time. Photographs of the revitalized downtown spaces illustrate the unique environment that characterizes locally-owned stores in revitalized downtowns, in particular those that exist

within older buildings. Such spaces may be considered unique and nonconformist when compared to retail space that is characteristic of modern shopping malls and chain stores, thereby adding to the experience of the phenomenon of shopping local (see Appendix B: Photography Template). Permission to photograph was requested from each store owner and individual participant before any photography commenced. To maintain the privacy and confidentiality of all participants, no identifying information was provided about the individuals in photos (see Appendix C: IRB Approval).

Other Data Collection Methods

In addition to being a participant observer at the physical store locations, I also used online sources to gather data. Although my online data collection was not regarded as “netnography,” characteristics of it were similar. Collecting data through online sources, similar to netnography, as Kozinets (2002) describes, “provides information on the symbolism, meanings, and consumption patterns of online consumer groups” (p. 61). With the prevalence of social media and the ways by which it has become an extension of the lives of many, it seemed a natural fit to explore the online presence of the locally-owned field sites and their online interactions with the consumers who patronize them. Furthermore, Kozinets (2002) posits that online activities can provide a picture of naturally occurring online behaviors, in this case it was typically consumers searching for information via the stores’ social media sites. As I found in the preliminary study mentioned in Chapter I, the businesses selected as field sites utilized social media to communicate with the community and to publicize special events, promotions, and even update customers on opening or closing hours when changes occur. Such information

and interactions were helpful in providing the broader context for interpreting the data relative to the research objectives.

To remain aware of ongoing events and activities, I followed each of the businesses' social media sites, including their websites, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and Instagram accounts, checking each one three times per week for updates and new posts. Then, during the eight-week period that I was in the field I observed and recorded posts made by each of the stores, online interactions between stores and interactions with and between their customers. I was particularly attuned to posts indicating any interest in supporting locally-owned stores and if there was support among members of the community or among store owners, such as one business supporting another or "sharing" a post from another store. I also observed interactions related to the overall dynamics of the different groups. For example, customers who offered opinions or shared information about other locally-owned stores or ways in which relationships in the community were fostered through locally-owned retail stores. Data collected from online sources was in the form of text and photos and was used to enhance field notes and data collected during the fieldwork and interviews.

Sample and Selection

I conducted a total of 30 in-depth interviews and 49 field interviews during the eight-week period that I was in the field. Sample selection included people who shop at the sites included in this study, as well as store owners and managers who interact with them. Including customers and store owners allows for a better understanding of the significance of local shopping within a downtown community and also how the

downtown community may, in turn, influence local shopping. As discussed above, I sought out representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and downtown partnership organizations. I conducted interviews with 5 individuals who are employed with such organizations for the purpose of gaining a broader perspective on the downtown community. Tables 1-3 outline the different participant samples and include basic demographic information. Names of individual participants and store locations have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

Table 1

Participant Information: Shoppers

Name	Age	Gender	Interview Location
Alex*	39	Male	City Cakes
Alexis	46	Female	All Good Things
Angie	38	Female	Oak Street
Brian	62	Male	Oak Street
Carol	42	Female	Garnet City Yarn
Courtney*	21	Female	The Blue Chair
Craig	33	Male	Lake Street
Emily*	42	Female	Marshall's
Ethan*	27	Male	The Coffee Bean
Evelyn*	77	Female	The Blue Chair
Gina	78	Female	The Coffee Bean
Greta	N/A	Female	City Cakes
Heather	49	Female	Garnet City Yarn
James*	29	Male	Participant's Office
Janet*	51	Female	Participant's Office
Janice	52	Female	City Cakes
Jasmine	35	Female	Oak Street
Jolene	71	Female	The Blue Chair
Juliette	47	Female	The Coffee Bean
Kathleen	65	Female	Antique Marketplace
Kayla	26	Female	Oak Street
Laurie	53	Female	All Good Things
Lisa	N/A	Female	The Coffee Bean
Luanne*	N/A	Female	City Cakes
Maddison	32	Female	Oak Street
Mary	72	Female	Garnet City Yarn

Megan	22	Female	All Good Things
Michelle*	74	Female	The Blue Chair
Mindy	66	Female	The Coffee Bean
Miriam	65	Female	Antique Marketplace
Mona	61	Female	The Blue Chair
Monique	39	Female	The Coffee Bean
Paul	40	Male	Lake Street
Pippa*	33	Female	Marshall's
Rachel*	29	Female	The Coffee Bean
Ralph	36	Male	Oak Street
Renee	26	Female	Marshall's
Sadie	30	Female	Knoll Hill
Sally	44	Female	Marshall's
Scott	44	Male	Oak Street
Shana	48	Female	The Beehive
Sherry	57	Female	Garnet City Yarn
Stephanie*	N/A	Female	The Coffee Bean
Susan	54	Female	The Blue Chair
Talia	33	Female	The Beehive
Tim*	52	Male	The Coffee Bean
Tina	20	Female	Lake Street
Valerie	21	Female	The Beehive
Victoria*	54	Female	City Cakes
Violet	31	Female	Oak Street
Whitney*	36	Female	The Coffee Bean
Yvonne	58	Female	The Blue Chair

Note. * Indicates In-Depth Interview.

Table 2

Participant Information: Store Owners and Managers

Name	Retail Business	Role	Interview Location
Abigail**	Garnet City Yarn/ Yarn Store	Owner	Garnet City Yarn
Annalisa**	The Beehive/ Women's Boutique	Owner	The Coffee Bean
Bradley**	The Blue Chair/ Bookstore	Owner	The Blue Chair
Cara*	All Good Things/ Gift Boutique	Manager	All Good Things
Cassandra**	Knoll Hill/ Men's Boutique	Manager	Knoll Hill
Eric*	Knoll Hill/ Men's Boutique	Co-Owner	Knoll Hill
Greg**	Marshall's/ Brewery	Owner	Marshall's
John**	South End Gallery/ Art Gallery	Owner	South End Gallery
Katherine**	The Coffee Bean/ Coffee Shop	Manager	The Coffee Bean
Liam**	Knoll Hill/ Men's Boutique	Owner	The Coffee Bean
Margaret**	Antique Marketplace/ Antique Store	Owner	Antique Marketplace
Sabine**	All Good Things/ Gift Boutique	Owner	All Good Things
Samantha*	Marshall's/ Brewery	Owner	Marshall's

Note. * Indicates In-Depth Interview. ** Indicates Field and In-Depth Interview.

Table 3

Participant Information: Community Partnership Organizations

Name	Business	Role	Interview Location
Naomi	Chamber of Commerce	Chief Operating Officer	Participant's office
Cindy	Chamber of Commerce	Executive Director	City Cakes
Lindy	Chamber of Commerce	Executive Vice President- Member Engagement	Participant's office
Julia	Downtown Claremont Inc.	Marketing Director	The Coffee Bean
Lucy	Buy Local First	Board of Directors- Chair	The Blue Chair

Note. In-depth interviews were conducted with all five.

Shoppers were recruited based on their level of involvement with local shopping, ranging from very involved, to occasionally involved, to first time downtown shoppers. I included some who are committed to shopping locally and make numerous purchases from locally-owned businesses and retailers, as well as some who shop locally on occasion, and some who were making a rare purchase from a locally-owned downtown retailer. It was important to capture a range of consumer commitment to shopping locally so as to gain an understanding of what these practices mean to each individual, and what shopping locally means in their day-to-day lives. Why they shop locally and their perceptions surrounding its significance are also things I sought to learn from this study. Likewise, my hope was to glean the extent to which shopping locally has impacted their overall consumption habits, and if so, in what ways.

Participant sample and selection fundamentally impacts any research study, as each individual brings his or her own perspective to the phenomenon (Evans-Pritchard &

Gillies, 1976). Keeping this in mind, careful thought and attention was given to how relationships were developed and who was recruited to participate. While in the field, I engaged with many people to recruit participants for in-depth and field interviews. In some situations, participants were recruited through gatekeepers. In other words, through relationships I built with shop owners and managers, I learned of customers who frequent the sites and this allowed me to connect with several of them through referrals and face-to-face introductions. One benefit to this method of participant selection was that it allowed for a more immediate sense of trust to be built with the participant and greater likelihood of their dedication to the process and exploration of the topic (Van Maanen, 1982). Snowball sampling was used as further contacts were made from each of the field interviews and from time spent in the field.

Field Interviews

As mentioned above, a total of 49 field interviews were conducted with store owners and shoppers. In the informal field interviews with shoppers, conversations often began by discussing if they shopped at that particular field site regularly, the nature of their purchase, and then asking about other local shopping that they engage in, including where they shop, what they buy and why they patronize specific shops or businesses (see Appendix D: Field Interview Schedule). If the conversation allowed, I asked about their overall consumption habits and whether or not they simplified, and if so, what their reasons were for doing this.

Field interviews with store owners also served to fill in additional details, supplementing the in-depth interviews. Topics often included conversations about the

site, “regular” customers, what feedback they, as owners, receive from customers regarding their location in the downtown area, day-to-day activities occurring within each location, and their relationships with other locally-owned businesses within the downtown area (see Appendix D). Each of these topics assisted in providing a more holistic understanding of the many roles the store owner plays within the downtown area.

In-Depth Interviews

Along with field interviews, in-depth interviews took place with all shop owners. In-depth interviews were arranged to accommodate the participants’ schedules. These interviews were semi-structured and the questions once again remained open so that the conversation could flow naturally based on the responses participants provided (see Appendix E: In-Depth Interview Schedule). Because I intended for these interviews to include local shop owners and employees, the content and questions of the interviews varied more than the questions asked during the field interviews. Interviews with shop owners covered information regarding why they selected the downtown location for their business, how the downtown area impacts their business, and their relationships with customers and other business owners. I also sought to learn about their perceptions of the people who support their businesses as well as the downtown area. I also asked store owners about their experiences and relationships with other downtown shop owners, including whether they experience shared support, and how they felt regarding the community. Interviews explored the nature of relationships that store owners have with their customers and the different ways they feel that customers support them or help to bring more people to the downtown area.

A total of 16 in-depth interviews were conducted with shoppers, and involved questions that pertained to their shopping behaviors. Questions focused on why they shop at these stores, what they seek to buy when they shop at these stores, and how much of their shopping is done in the downtown area and at locally-owned businesses (see Appendix E). Additional questions regarding their feelings about locally-owned shops and shop owners in the downtown area and the overall experience of shopping downtown were also asked.

In-depth interviews with five representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and/or downtown partnership organizations were conducted to explore additional facets of revitalization initiatives and experiences. This helped me to learn about their experiences with locally-owned businesses as part of the downtown community and their perceptions of the importance of such establishments for the community. These interviews allowed me to consider the process of downtown revitalization and the role of independently owned stores within it (see Appendix E).

Reflexivity

As someone who regularly shops at locally-owned retailers, I am aware that my own connection to and experiences with such places was likely an influence on my research and therefore must be considered. Davies (2008) suggests that all researchers are connected to the subject matter they are researching in some way or another, and while astronomers may be linked to stellar events, in this case, as a human linked to a culture and the social world, the issue of reflexivity is all the more vital. Although I attempted to acknowledge my own preconceived notions regarding the phenomenon, my

goal was to undertake the research process being open to whatever I found. Therefore, being transparent about my own position allowed me to recognize and take responsibility for the role I had in the research process (Peñaloza & Cayla, 2006).

van Manen (1990) points to the advantages that come from reflecting on an experience, and that it is through reflection that an experience gains meaning. That is, only through reflection can an experience truly be known and fully understood. To this end, after a day in the field, I reserved time to step back and consider all of the pieces, as a whole, and reflect on how my role as both an insider and an outsider shaped my approach to data collection. As discussed earlier, I kept a journal where, through methodological and analytic field notes, I documented my own thoughts, feelings and reactions to the experiences related to the research, including documenting how my own participation became a part of the research process. As will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation, through this reflection I gained a deeper understanding of the topic.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Once data collection was complete, field notes were typed and interviews were transcribed verbatim. Field notes, interview transcripts, photographs and online data were then analyzed for meanings that emerged and considered relative to the objectives of the study (Clifford, 1986). Keegan (2009) indicates that analysis provides the researcher with the tools to sort the data, and interpretation helps to “fill in the gaps” (p. 209) to make meaning of the data and create links to understand how it all relates. For

this reason, Spiggle (1994) suggests two processes of inference--data analysis and interpretation--in qualitative research.

Analysis provides a means to break apart the entirety of the data for the purposes of putting it together again based on categories that emerge (Spiggle, 1994). Specifically, Spiggle (1994) suggests categorizing the data by labeling and classifying what has been observed, then abstracting, or grouping it into more general clusters, eliminating specifics and minutia to create high-order groupings. This is followed by comparing what may be similar or different across the data. I applied this approach to the data that I collected including field notes, interview transcripts and photos taken.

The process of analysis is iterative, constantly moving back and forth between and across the data (field notes, interview transcripts, visual data, and online data) while refuting and scrutinizing inferences based on the findings (Spiggle, 1994). Interpretation involves identifying the meanings of the concept and then integrating these meanings to better understand the relationships between and among them (Spiggle, 1994).

Interpretation provides a higher level of understanding of the phenomenon established in the analysis so that it may be fully understood (Spiggle, 1994). Based on my analysis of the data, I approached the interpretation of meaning through discussion of emergent themes, this thematic interpretation comprises Chapters IV-VI. Themes were then articulated relative to the literature and the conceptual framework used to address the study's purpose and objectives, which comprises Chapters VII and VIII.

Summary

In this chapter, the methodological framework that was employed in the study was discussed. An ethnographic approach to research was described, along with the methods of data collection and sample. Last, the approach to analysis and interpretation of the data was discussed. The next chapter presents the first of these thematic interpretation chapters.

CHAPTER IV

THEMATIC INTERPRETATION PART I: UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACE

As discussed in Chapter I, findings from preliminary research on the topic revealed that place is a concept that is important to understanding shopping locally in the context of a revitalized downtown (Cohen, 2007). Retail has been described as fundamental to a city's viability (Robertson, 1995), in that it provides not only practical benefits, but economic and social benefits, as well as symbolic meaning for a city (Kitsinger, 2013). Throughout the research conducted for this dissertation, participants, as shoppers and as local retail business owners, shared stories and experiences that illustrate how "place" (i.e., the revitalized downtown) is central to the notion of shopping locally.

As will be discussed in this chapter, the interpretation of the data reveals that participants share similar ideas about and meanings of the sites observed in this dissertation, including the downtown area and the local retail businesses within it. These ideas and meanings appear to unite business owners and shoppers, and foster a sense of attachment to the place among them. Four thematic areas emerged from the data to define the dimensions of "place" and why place is key to their decisions to shop and/or own a business in the downtown area: (a) *Functional*, (b) *Hedonic*, (c) *Aesthetic*, and (d) *Symbolic*. Each dimension is discussed in turn within the following sections.

Functional

As it might be expected, the functional aspects of the revitalized downtown area surfaced as key to the experiences of both business owners and shoppers. However, while the functional aspects of place are important, participants clearly expressed mixed ideas about which aspects are most fundamental to the experience. From one business owner and shopper to the next, perspectives seemed to differ. To better understand these differences, several issues are explored within this thematic area, including (a) *Conveniences and Inconveniences*, (b) *Day vs. Night*, and (c) *Availability and Accessibility*.

Conveniences and Inconveniences

When participants were asked why they choose to shop downtown, they shared fairly consistent responses overall. Often reasons as simple as the location, convenience, or familiarity were indicated. As Emily explained: “I guess it’s convenient, I live pretty close to downtown...and I used to work down here so I was downtown five days a week.” Similarly, Alex said that when he shops downtown “I think of convenience...it has the things I need and they're close by and handy.” In contrast, while the convenience of the area is why Pippa chooses to come downtown for some of her shopping, an inconvenience of shopping downtown has to do with the offerings. She explained, “It’s convenient to where I live...but, I guess I don’t do most of my retail shopping downtown because we have only a few retail shops. It would actually be kind of hard to do much shopping downtown.” A similar viewpoint was offered by Evelyn, who loves to come downtown, but talked about the lack of shops and restaurant offerings that appeal to her

and what she wished she could find downtown, such as, “I’d like to see more realistic stores, a five and dime, you know...you go, you look...but you need things you can actually buy, they need something realistic, functional...” Evelyn thinks that while the downtown area is convenient for her to visit, it does not hold enough practical store options for her to do much of her “everyday” shopping there.

The conveniences (or inconveniences) afforded by the downtown shopping area were not just important to participants who are shoppers. Indeed, Annalisa, who is a store owner, acknowledged that at times she may lose customers due to the inconveniences of the downtown area when compared to other retail formats. She explained,

A: I really think there is something here, the idea of local and shopping downtown again, but I think people will always buy online for the convenience... Sometimes you just have to get it done and it goes to Amazon. But I think a lot of my customers want to support local businesses downtown as much as possible, but some things like diapers, necessities you know, are just always going to come from Amazon, they just are, I’m sorry, but it’s the truth. I get it, I do it too.

Annalisa’s explanation of how the functional benefits as well as drawbacks of shopping downtown impact her as both a store owner and a shopper illustrates her understanding of the tradeoffs consumers make when going downtown to shop.

Likewise, one inconvenience that garnered widespread attention from participants who are store owners and shoppers alike is the parking situation. For some shoppers, the search for parking appears to be a mild inconvenience, as Renee explained, “I like being able to walk to places, so once I find parking I can get to nearly everything I want from

that spot...” However, for other participants, the parking situation seriously impacts their ability to shop downtown. Michelle’s experience clearly illustrates this point:

M: It [the parking] has definitely impacted me seriously over the last five years because my knees are deteriorating and I walk with a cane. There are not conveniently-placed handicap parking spaces in the downtown. You can get a handicap parking space in any of the downtown parking garages... but if you can't walk the long distance to get to Oak Street from there...what good does it do you?

Michelle was very passionate about how this particular functional aspect of the downtown shopping experience has negatively impacted her ability to shop downtown as much as she once did, and how it limits her options when she is downtown.

Participants who are business owners also shared their opinions about the impact of the parking situation, on their stores and their customers. Abigail recognizes that parking might be a barrier for shoppers by suggesting that she, too, has experienced some frustrations with finding parking downtown:

A: If you know you're coming downtown, there's a mental block of like...okay the place I want to go is downtown and the first thing you think of is ...*Oh crap, where am I going to park*, so you really have to psyche yourself up to drive around and find a place to park, for maybe 10 minutes...that's a lot of frustration for someone who wants to just shop...go in and get what they need...I know, and I hear this from my customers...they’re coming for something very specific.

Abigail finds that the lack of easily accessible parking is a frustration for her customers, and recognizes that when they need something that is not unique to her store, they will likely choose to visit a chain store due to easy access and ample parking.

Liam, also a store owner, dismissed the complaints he gets about the parking from customers, and thinks that perceptions of difficult parking downtown are exaggerated. In discussing the parking situation, Liam pointed to the irony of the misconception:

L: Battling the perception that parking is terrible or that it's unsafe, those are the main things...parking is *huge*, people don't want to park and walk a block, it's "Target Syndrome," you park and go in...even though you park and may have to walk the same distance from your parking spot to the front door...it's ridiculous.

According to Liam, the perception of parking being a big problem for the downtown area is largely unfounded. Similarly, Samantha, who owns a brewery, repeated this same frustration, as she often hears the same complaint from customers:

S: Oh it's crazy that people complain about parking here...I mean seriously people, have you been to real cities, big cities where you really can bitch about parking? What we have here for a parking *issue* is nothing. People need to get a grip.

Interestingly, Samantha explained that customers have even approached her and her employees about parking tickets they received while inside the brewery, asking if they (the business owners) would be able to have the parking tickets waived. Samantha exclaimed, "Oh my God, it's crazy...we don't own the parking lots, we have nothing to do with the streets. I don't know what they're thinking."

Further complicating the issue of parking in the downtown area, one participant, Janet, shared an experience that she directly connects to the parking that adds frustration to her overall experiences with shopping downtown:

J: I think parking can be a pain sometimes, I mean you can always find a parking spot but you may have to walk sometimes really far, that's what I don't really like...it's not the walking *per se*, it's the...and probably the same thing that other people don't really like...it's that then I'm being approached by people and being asked for money...that's the part I don't like.

Janet's experience of being approached by panhandlers means that she strategizes about her parking based on walking the shortest distance to the stores and eateries that she intends to visit.

Panhandling by the homeless is an issue that participants who are store owners frequently cited as a unique challenge to owning and operating a business in the downtown area. Some, like Abigail, simply noted an awareness of the issue: "Of course...we get some characters that stop in, it's always something..." As if to substantiate Abigail's comment, on a subsequent visit to her store, which was on a sunny weekday afternoon, I observed a somewhat disheveled man come in off of the street and ask for aspirin. Abigail did not have any aspirin to give him, but another customer in the yarn store did have some and offered it to the gentleman. He took the aspirin, thanked the woman for it, and walked back out.

While Abigail explained that being downtown means she will have an occasional unexpected visitor, she did not share any particularly positive or negative feelings about it. However, other participants who are store owners talked about some of the negative impact that the homeless population, unique to the downtown location of their stores, might have on customers and business operations. For example, Sabine compared how the homeless can potentially impact shops downtown, versus stores located inside of a shopping mall,

S: We do have to deal with some of the homeless population wandering in. A few years ago we had to deal with it more, it doesn't seem to be as big of an issue right now, but we deal with it some. It makes customers uncomfortable when someone comes into your establishment asking for money and... they'll quickly leave [the customers], so that is an issue more in the past not as much right now. And in a shopping center you have security, so that's obviously not a problem for them.

Sabine's excerpt indicates that in the past she has had customers leave her store when homeless individuals ventured in. She also indicated that it has made her and her employees uncomfortable on occasions when they are alone in the store. Yet, some of the participants who are store owners expressed compassion for the homeless problem. For example, Bradley, who owns a bookstore in the area, stated:

B: The homeless population is obviously an issue, but homelessness is a much bigger problem for the homeless people themselves than for me. It's sad, but it does keep people away and as a business owner I'm not thrilled when someone is sleeping in the doorway, I hate seeing it and...I mean the guy is sleeping there but...

Bradley showed concern for the homelessness he sees on a daily basis but also understands the potential negative impact it has on his business operations. Other participants, like Margaret, who owns an antique store, displayed obvious compassion. During an interview with her, a homeless man walked into the store and Margaret greeted him, saying "Hey, how are you doing today? Do you need a water?" The gentleman said "Hello" back and took her up on her offer for water and then left the store. Our interview then picked up where it left off. It was apparent that Margaret is familiar with this particular individual and that this is a rather routine occurrence in her store.

Some participants who are store owners took a more active approach to creating solutions for dealing with or providing help to the homeless. For example, one participant posted an event involving a vendor and explained how the business provides jobs, training, and food to the local homeless population (see Figure 5). Another holds monthly *plarning* events (creating yarn from plastic bags) to gather customers together and either knit or crochet bedrolls that are constructed from plastic grocery bags for the homeless (see Figure 6).

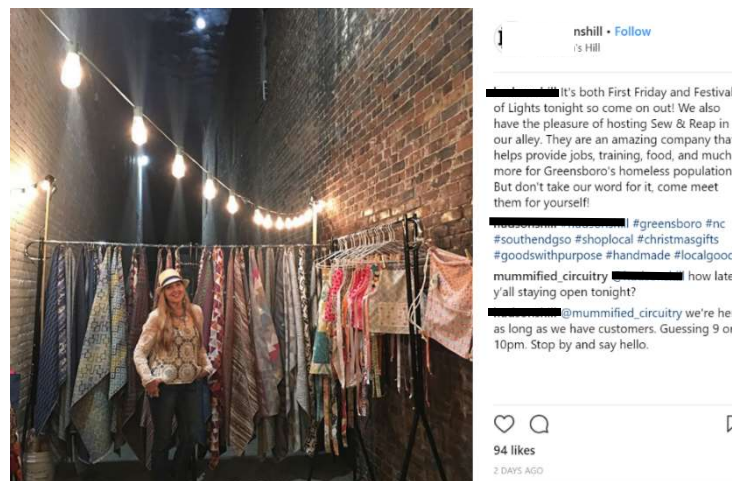


Figure 5. Downtown Event Featuring a Company that Helps the Homeless



Figure 6. Store Planning Event (photo by author)

Clearly, there are both conveniences and inconveniences related to the functional aspects of the downtown location. Store owners perceive the downtown area to offer disadvantages that are unique in comparison to stores in other parts of the city, and in particular, those related to parking and the local homeless population. The majority of the participants who are business owners think that there is a need to address the parking issue, while the rest think that the problem is really a misperception on the part of the customers, and that, with time, they will come to expect these difficulties and take them in stride. Participants who are shoppers see the issue a little differently and describe the parking issue as a challenge.

Despite the differences of opinion, all of the participants seem to recognize that shopping at or owning a retail business in the downtown area comes with added complications. Ideally, addressing some of the practical concerns voiced by participants would help to alleviate hesitations of shoppers and would allow business owners to focus

solely on the business itself, rather than the environment in which it operates. At the same time, such issues make for the uniqueness of the “place.” This uniqueness seems to be part of the draws of the downtown area, not just for shopping, but for eating, drinking, and for entertainment.

Day vs. Night

Participants seemed to share a general awareness about the differences between the day and nighttime attractions of the downtown area. As a result of revitalization, many of the new establishments located downtown are bars, breweries, and nightclubs, which are designed to attract people “after hours.” Although participants recognize that the addition of these businesses to the downtown area is an important part of revitalization, they hold differing views about the nature of the impact. For example, Liam’s business is located close to several recently launched drinking establishments. He explained that the addition of these businesses may be bringing him more customers, “So many businesses and bars are opening and people are like----*Oh, the other side of the tracks, we have to go there.*” Like many of the participants who are business owners, Liam views the addition of these bars as a positive change for the neighborhood, providing a reason for people to come to a part of downtown which was once abandoned. Although Liam acknowledged that the hours the bars are open usually means people will have to make a separate trip downtown to visit his store, he hopes that they may see his store for the first time when they are out for the evening and want to visit it when it is open. Likewise, Margaret’s antique store has fluctuating store hours due to the potential customers that the evening crowd downtown offers. She explained, “There's definitely a

day and night crowd....I try to stay open some evenings, there's such a gap from 5-7 with people coming home from work, going out to eat, but I don't want to be open 7-9.”

Margaret’s sentiments about the busy times of the day and the different crowds was shared among participants who are store owners. Interestingly, participants who shop downtown echoed the same sentiments. Emily was very positive when talking about the bars and breweries that have recently opened, saying, “Yeah, they’re absolutely great. It’s an evolving business sense down here, so...places like Tapcade, Marshalls...all the restaurants and bars coming, there’s always something different to do.” While some participants, like Emily, recognize that the bars and breweries have given people more options for nightlife, others view their presence as more than just nightlife options. For Annalisa, a boutique owner located in the same block as Liam, one of the bars in particular has become more than a place to drink. She explained, “With Tapcade, it’s not just a bar, but really a community space to meet up and play games and hang out on the front porch.” Annalisa’s description of this bar highlights how it is contributing to the revitalization of the neighborhood by helping to bring people together within an area that had previously been abandoned and was somewhat derelict.

Although many participants, including shoppers and store owners, are happy about the addition of bars and nightclubs in downtown, others hold differing views. Abigail, who took over ownership of a yarn store downtown commented on how these types of businesses have impacted lease rates with her landlord. She shared a story about her landlord, who first leased the space to the original yarn store owner about 26 years

ago. Back then, the landlord knew that selling enough yarn to make rent every month would be tough, so he was willing to provide a deal on the rent:

A: He said, *OK we'll give it a try, it's either that or put another bar down here.....*and the owner didn't want to do that. I'm lucky, my landlord really wants a retail shop in the space, anything that isn't alcohol or club related.....After a couple of years he was like...*She made her rent, they're quiet, they don't blast music or cause problems.* I don't know exactly why she picked this spot, only that she came to him and pitched a deal and they worked it out.

Abigail is the fourth consecutive owner of the yarn shop and explained that her rent is well below market value. Should her landlord charge fair market value, she could not afford to remain in the space. The lease agreement is due, in part, to an attempt to keep the space free from becoming another downtown bar or nightclub. Abigail herself did not share any negative views about the downtown bars and breweries during our interview, but going forward, she indicated that she would like to see new retail stores open rather than more drinking establishments.

For some participants, it is not that alcohol-related venues are a problem, but rather, the changes in the types of customers and/or the type of people patronizing these establishments that is the problem. For example, Greg and Samantha, brewery owners for three years, talked about how they have seen negative changes to the downtown in this short time. They chose their location because the block appeared to be promising for revitalization, and because the space would suit the needs they have for large brewing equipment. Indeed, the area has undergone intense revitalization and these changes have impacted their initial vision for the brewery, including the customers who were once

regulars. Commenting on the neighborhood and the changes they have seen, Samantha noted that:

S: The area has changed and turned into a late-night entertainment district, which isn't a fit for us and who we are. We are family friendly, we want people coming in and sitting for a few hours...a family coming in with kids and seeing two other families with kids who would all end up playing board games while the parents talk. Now they don't feel comfortable doing that anymore---it's 23yr olds glaring at them, single, they don't understand.....I want to tell them, *You just wait, you'll do it too*. Our regular crowd doesn't feel comfortable anymore and the crowd we're picking up, they just go somewhere to stare at a screen...[laughs]. That's not the kind of place we want to be.

Greg and Samantha both commented on their recent decision to put in a television, something they were adamantly against at the outset of the business, and the negative response they were getting about it from those friends and family members who knew of their original vision for the brewery. They explained that the decision was based purely on trying to appease what has become the customer base that now supports their business. Not surprisingly, the owners recently announced that they will be moving into a new, larger location and leaving the downtown area that they once envisioned as the perfect home for their business. In addition to the influx of new patrons, the busiest hours of operation during the day has also changed. Greg hopes that moving out of their current location and into a neighborhood that is not a hotspot for bars or nightlife will be more suitable than the downtown area has become:

G: I think the character of that neighborhood will help and as it redevelops...the location, etc...won't turn into a late-night place, it will probably go in a direction that is compatible with who we are. We're really hoping it's a long-term home for us.

Changes in the downtown area and the differences between night and day were also noted by some of the participants who are shoppers. While some see the addition of bars, breweries, and nightclubs as a good thing, one participant in particular voiced her frustration about the fact that the downtown area has become a hub of nightlife for younger generations, offering fewer options targeted at older adults, who would still like to go out for a drink or an evening of entertainment. Evelyn explained:

E: The nightclubs are packed but the city doesn't want to do something for middle-aged or older people. They need a café, jazz music...they could have a place like that downtown. I know I can go to the O'Henry to do that but it's very expensive. But they need something like that to draw other people in down here.

Although Evelyn's comments suggest that she thinks it is the city's responsibility to offer options for a more mature crowd, her primary complaint is that the evening nightlife and entertainment offerings in the downtown area are not geared toward older crowds, echoing the frustrations experienced by Greg and Samantha.

Clearly the types of businesses, patrons, and popular hours for visiting the downtown area are not altogether positive changes for all store owners and shoppers in this study. Despite the revitalization occurring downtown, participants have varying perspectives on the changes that the drinking establishments in particular have brought to the area. Such changes point to the ways that a downtown develops an identity as a place, especially one where diverse groups of people seek unique and individualized experiences. Based on participants' perspectives, it appears that the challenge comes in curating an appropriate mix of options within the space.

Availability and Access

Although more obviously functional aspects of the physical place clearly impact participants, when talking about the spaces downtown, it is interesting that the ownership of the buildings also emerged as a common topic of discussion. It seems that a primary issue impacting downtown revitalization, and especially small business owners within the downtown area, is access to and affordability of retail space. Whether participants who are business owners own their buildings or they are renting often came up during conversations, as it is a significant contributor to the viability of doing businesses in the downtown area. While some business owners talked of having good relationships with their landlords, such as Abigail's previously mentioned discounted lease rates, not all participants who are business owners shared such positive feelings. For example, when discussing the revitalization that is occurring downtown, Eric, co-owner of a boutique clothing and accessory store, talked about the amount of control that various owners and developers have on the downtown as a whole, and shared his perspective on how this control impacts downtown development,

E: It's funny because, I thought man...there's three people in this town who play the real-life version of Monopoly....They have all this money and they control everything downtown. I don't mean it disrespectfully, but there's all this development going on and it's very vanilla in places that long and lust for color, like everything Kane develops and everything Adam develops...it all looks the same, and then they start working with people and telling them the space is theirs [but] halfway through they come back and say, *No, no, no... this has to be like that, and that has to be over there*, and they hold all the cards and you're indentured and you already signed.

Eric's opinion of the building owners in the downtown coincides with that of his business partner, Liam. Liam thinks that the ownership of many buildings in the downtown by just a few individuals is actually interfering with revitalization efforts. As he explained,

L: The potential the downtown can have if some people relinquish control of things that have fallen into disrepair...you know, and let others breathe life back into the buildings and the area...but that's a hard one, getting people to let go...you can't do much about it, but the conversations help them know that people do want to do something about it.

Liam is of the opinion that the power some developers and building owners have not only halts development efforts, but allows for further deterioration in the downtown area.

Conversely, while many participants who are business owners feel negatively about the developers who control many of the downtown spaces, one participant, who is a Chamber of Commerce representative, spoke positively about the practices of the same property developers, exclaiming: "[The developer] has had so much going on, it's very exciting" (Naomi). Notably, Naomi's perspective is not that of a business owner seeking to rent space, but rather that of a representative of a community partnership organization.

Greg, a business owner, thinks that the community partnership with the developers is a problem. He explained how he thinks the community and city are negatively impacting revitalization and are siding with developers instead of business owners,

G: The city is giving developers money to do things...but it's not helping small business. You have to have people who will take risks as businesses. The developers don't run the businesses, they create jobs during construction but then they just collect rent. It's the businesses in these buildings that create sustained jobs but the developers get a tax break to develop the building and then the

business pays all the taxes---in this town, the developers are like rock stars--- Adam owns this whole street.

This excerpt from Greg's interview underscores his perspective on downtown development, and how support for the city impacts each party differently. Equally important, Abigail indicated that even when building owners are willing to lease space, disagreements between the potential lessees and the owners stall or even stop businesses from going into vacant spaces. Due to the deterioration resulting from the length of time that some of the buildings have gone unoccupied, extensive repairs and updates are necessary. Abigail explained, "Right now, if we could just get the landlords to actually meet the requirements of the businesses so that they could move in," she thinks this would alleviate some of the delays, but suggests that owners are unwilling to update the buildings to meet potential tenants' needs.

Although some participants who own retail businesses downtown hold negative opinions about the local developers, other participants shared very positive sentiments about the same individuals. For example, Annalisa praised Adam, the same developer that Eric and Greg complained about, suggesting that he is one of the reasons for all of the change and revitalization occurring in the downtown area, stating "My landlord Adam Miller, because of the properties he owns on this end...it's a big thing and it contributes to why this end is changing." She further explained, "He's awesome, he worked with me for months...finding me the right spot for my store." However, Annalisa talked about envying a neighboring business owner who owns the building she operates out of, stating that "She isn't under any obligation to make rent each month."

The concept of *making rent* each month is another functional issue of place that emerged in discussions with participants who are business owners. All are concerned about the viability of their own businesses, and some are concerned about the impact of rising rent costs coming from landlords and long-time building owners. As Greg, who rents his current space, opined,

G: Some of these landlords aren't focused on growth... new tenants are coming and paying a lot more for their rents than the old ones.... And some of the businesses who have been here forever, their building is paid off, they aren't aggressive business people.

Margaret, a relatively new business owner who owns her own building, is sympathetic to the hurdles of many business owners in the area, stating,

M: I think the biggest stumbling block is the rent for new businesses. I really don't know what the rate is because we never looked to rent. Maybe that's why there are so many empty spaces, people can't afford it. We need the landlords to offer lower rents to get people in, you need that perception of a lot of people in, a lot of activity, [it is just] empty, empty, empty stores then...who wants to come. We need incentives. The landlords around here don't seem to care, it's like...*Pay me this much or it will sit here*, but no, it's like wouldn't you rather get half of that and have someone in the door, but these landlords don't seem to care. The landlords are controlling so much of what's happening downtown.

Margaret views her position as fortunate, in that she owns her building and does not feel the pressure of making rent each month. Consequently, she sympathizes with Annalisa, who is a neighboring business owner, suggesting that “Annalisa can't afford to fail, she has a family, she has to pay her bills.” This sentiment is shared by John, the owner of an art gallery downtown, who said, “I lease it...I would have loved to have owned it and to

have invested in it, but when I came here I did not have the funds to invest... This would have been a really nice investment...” John went on to suggest that, had he been able to buy the space he is currently renting, the future of his business would be much brighter.

Other participants who own their own spaces think that the purchase of the buildings was done out of foresight that revitalization would occur in the future. In talking with Katharine, who manages a coffee shop, about the building where the coffee shop is housed, she stated, “I think the owners had a vision of revitalization down here.” For example, Katherine talked about a New Year’s Eve party that the owners held in the vacant building before the coffee shop opened and before renovation had even begun, saying, “I think they really wanted to show people the space and get people excited....There was literally nothing here back then.” Katherine’s description of the building owners’ vision as compared to developers who have more strategic financial goals, highlights the extent to which the objectives of the building owners can significantly impact the experiences of local business owners, and ultimately, the revitalization of the downtown area.

In sum, access to and availability of the physical spaces emerged as an important functional aspect of place, and particularly for participants who are business owners. Being able to run a viable business ultimately impacts downtown revitalization efforts, particularly who owns what and where. Functional aspects related the downtown location including, but not limited to, issues with parking, fluctuating crowds, and retail space availability surfaced as key to participants. Such dynamics, in turn, impact the

experiences of shoppers who are seeking more retail options in the downtown area, and are discussed in the next section.

Hedonic

Although functional aspects related to the downtown surfaced as fundamental to the experiences of participants, hedonic characteristics of the downtown area and shopping in locally-owned retailers there also surfaced as important. Hedonic consumption, explained by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) is “multisensory” (p. 92). That is, it encapsulates how senses, such as sight, sound, and touch can affect one’s perception of an experience. Hedonic aspects of the downtown relate to the different ways that participants talked about how the characteristics of the downtown area make them feel, or contribute to their feelings about shopping locally. Two hedonic characteristics that are particularly related to place that emerged as important to the participants are: (a) *A Different Vibe*, and (b) *An Escape*. Both are discussed in this section.

A Different Vibe

As pointed out in the previous section, there are many functional aspects of the downtown area that emerged which differentiate it from other shopping areas, as well as other parts of the city. However, there are also many experiential, and even energizing, aspects that participants shared when talking about their experiences with shopping downtown. The overall sensory allure of the area was expressed by many as a feeling or *vibe* that they get when they are downtown. This is the case for participants who shop downtown, as well as those who own businesses there. Many seem aware of not only the

atmosphere of the entire downtown area, but of the specific parts of downtown. For example, Samantha reminisced about how the specific city block that their brewery is located on contributed to the decision to locate there:

S: So...we really liked that this was a funky area, you know? I mean, Anywhere [store], art galleries, this was the antique and art gallery district, we liked the feel of the area, the vibe...and people in those industries tend to be independent, independent thinkers, independent businesses, you know...that type.

Samantha's view of her business as unique in what it offers led her and her husband Greg to locate the brewery on a block with other like-minded businesses, which seemed like the right fit. Similarly, Samantha and Greg's neighbor, Annalisa, considered how the atmosphere of her individual store as part of the specific block impacts her customers and how she can create the best possible environment. She explained,

A: One thing I am trying to do with my store is create an atmosphere that isn't just...I love antique stores but they're not for everyone...I want people who don't even love old things to see the atmosphere and say that they can see having those items in their house.

Annalisa is clearly aware of how her store fits in on a block known for its art galleries and antique stores, and how the atmosphere within her store affects her customers. She also noted how the feeling of being downtown impacted her choice of store location, saying:

A: I always prefer to be in an outdoor setting, I like seeing sunlight and knowing what is happening outside, but the conveniences and really that community feel that comes with the walkability. You can call your friends and say *Do you want*

to meet for lunch, coffee...See you 15 minutes, you can walk, there's something nice about that, it contributes to that overall vibe.

Annalisa's explanation of the features of being downtown that are important to her include several sensory aspects, such as being able to see the sunlight and the people going by, as well as what she refers to as the *vibe* of downtown. Each contributes to her own enjoyment of being downtown.

Several participants who are business owners, as well as those who work as store managers, reflected on how the presence of certain stores have influenced the feeling in the downtown area. For example, Katharine, a coffee shop manager, suggested that one vintage clothing store in particular has contributed to the atmosphere of the entire area, saying "They [the vintage store] brought that eclectic focus...that vintage vibe, more hipster and, umm, artistic, that's really been a huge thing for the area." The vibe Katharine described is something she credits the vintage store with providing the downtown area, and something that, in turn, helped facilitate the revitalization efforts there. Sabine pointed to the fact that this atmosphere has made the downtown area more like the "heart of the city," explaining,

S: I feel like the downtown is the heart of the city. When I visit places I always want to see the downtown, and our core customer really loves the downtown setting. There is always something going on. It's very locally focused, so I love being down here, the vibe is energetic and that's our vibe.

The feeling, or vibe, that these business owners talked about is something that participants who shop downtown also noted. For example, Evelyn remarked "The

atmosphere is nice. Everyone says *Hello*. Sometimes you run into people you know. It's just a very friendly, homey atmosphere downtown." For Evelyn, one of the things that contributes to the pleasant feeling is that it is *homey*, though she actually lives in another city that is approximately fifteen miles away. Whitney also highlighted the features of the place that create the vibe, saying that "The atmosphere...that's definitely better here. You get the old buildings, the feeling of the main street." While shoppers like Whitney equate it to more of a small town, or of being on "Main Street," other shoppers suggested that the area actually reminds them of a big city. Tim noted:

T: I like it because it is more of that city vibe all the streets and...it's electric not New York electric but more electric than The Friendly Center, or Battleground...or just your average strip mall...the stuff you can find in every other town in America.

For Tim, the shopping experience includes not only the functional aspects of what he can find in the stores, but the vibe he feels when shopping in them. Other shoppers, such as Talia, shared similar feelings about the vibe, or the feeling that there is something unique about shopping downtown, stating that it is "A completely different vibe! No big-box feel." Likewise, Megan stated, "The vibe is great," echoing the idea that being downtown prompts a special feeling, whatever that may be. Some, like Emily, did not exactly know how to explain it, but know they feel something different, "It's a different vibe down here...The stores are different. It's not going to be something you can get anywhere...it's hard to describe really, just a different overall vibe."

In sum, the nature of the "vibe," or feeling that the downtown area evokes, varies somewhat among participants, but in all cases the atmosphere of the place positively

contributes to the overall hedonic aspects of the downtown area. Interestingly, along with the overall feeling of the place, participants also talked about how the place feels as though it offers them an escape, as discussed in the next section.

An Escape

Alongside the vibe of the area, for many participants, the downtown area provides a sense of *escape*. This is the case for participants who shop there as well as those who own businesses. Naomi, from the Chamber of Commerce shared why she likes shopping in the stores downtown:

N: [I like to] just browse and look, try on, touch....It's an escape....I need a little more escape in life. I've got to try it on, I can't be shipping it back and forth 6-7 times, some things I know this is my brand, this size fits in this white shirt, sure maybe I go online to do that, but...I like to go in for the escape and the customer experience.

For Naomi, the shopping experience involves the functional aspects of not having to ship a product back and forth, which can happen when buying products online, but is also about the experience that in-store shopping provides for her, and specifically the chance to look and touch the products that she is drawn to.

Similarly, Emily, a shopper who worked downtown until very recently, referred to the downtown area as a place where she can go to unwind or take a break during the workday. Emily talked about her days downtown, saying “I needed to escape my office and get out, walk around the shops and just kind of breathe...” For Emily, the experience of shopping downtown includes the sense of freedom she felt as she would leave her office to walk to nearby restaurants, coffee shops and boutiques. The fact that shopping

downtown allows for a relaxing escape also surfaced for Michelle, who compared it to shopping at a mall,

M: Well, when I shop downtown I think it's a more relaxed atmosphere and I think it is friendlier you know...heading out to a mall which you know can be very frenetic and just not pleasant...I think it is more pleasant to shop downtown.

Michelle's comments suggest that the downtown atmosphere offers a pleasant and relaxing escape that she enjoys, and that this particular feeling is something she does not experience when shopping in other places or parts of the city. Interestingly, for some participants, the sense of escape they experience in the downtown area was not just about relaxing. Heather talked about the escape the downtown area offers her, by saying "The downtown has a city street feel," suggesting that it reminds her of being in a bigger city. Kayla shared a similar feeling, explaining, "It also feels more like a real city."

It is not just the atmosphere of the downtown area as a whole, but of specific stores that participants described as contributing to a sense of escape. For example, Eric mentioned, "People come in here and are like...*Wow, this looks like it should be in New York* and we're like...One it would cost ten times as much...and Two...we'd be like a dime a dozen there." Eric indicated that the atmosphere in his store makes customers feel they are somewhere else entirely, even though his store might be considered typical if it were located elsewhere.

Although shoppers were quick to mention that the downtown area, and even specific stores within it, offers something different, including an escape, store owners are equally aware of what draws their customers to the downtown. For instance, Abigail

thinks that the atmosphere of downtown and of her specific store contributes to whatever shoppers are looking for. She explained, “They want an escape, or they want connection, or they come in here because want to bounce ideas off of someone.” Clearly, Abigail recognizes that the needs her store fulfills vary from customer to customer, but that they are more than purely functional.

Overall, the notion that the downtown area offers participants a sense of escape from their daily lives, or a way to mentally transport them to a more relaxing place, is important to the overall experience of shopping local. Although the feelings that the downtown area conjures up for participants are key to their experiences within it, certain visual aspects of the downtown area are also important to them, and are discussed in the next section.

Aesthetic

According to the literature, the visual appeal of a downtown area has been found to be more attractive for some consumers than big-box stores (Faulk, 2006). Specifically, the presence of historic buildings and elements of traditional main streets may offer a certain charm that is attractive to many (Robertson, 1999). In this dissertation, two key issues emerged from the data as central to understanding how participants interpret the aesthetic characteristics of the downtown area: (a) *A Changing Face*, and (b) *Unique Places and Spaces*. Both issues are discussed in detail within this section.

A Changing Face

Revitalization efforts in many downtowns across the country have prompted retail development, stimulating renewed interest in shopping downtown among consumers

(Cohen, 2007). A similar phenomenon appears to be the case for the city examined in this dissertation. Perceptions about the downtown area and how it has changed over the years vary from participant to participant, including shoppers and business owners. For example, Tim, a long-time resident, offered his take on the changes he has witnessed in the past two decades:

T: You used to go downtown...like, say twenty years ago...and you might see a guy walking around and everything shut down at night and then you started seeing more and more open doors and things starting up and a lot of the old buildings that were...I'm not sure what kind of buildings they were, maybe office buildings or industrial businesses, and ummm, that started to change to artisan space and event space and I started seeing more shops and restaurants...

Tim's description of the changes he has seen over the past two decades reveals the stark difference between the downtown that many participants remember and what currently exists. To this point, Cara stated, "10 years ago it was not a destination for people to come downtown." Several participants commented on changes in the area. For instance, Emily, who has worked downtown for the past seven years, stated "I swear every time I'm down here I see new places that I don't remember seeing the last time." Michelle noted that the changes she has seen in the downtown area include "More variety in the kind of stores and more upscale in terms of businesses and restaurants for sure, and really more unique places to go...and I think that's been good."

Along with changes in the types of businesses that have been established downtown, participants talked about seeing fewer vacant buildings over the years. Victoria described a number of changes that she has experienced in the years she has regularly visited the downtown area, citing that:

V: I've been going down and participating [in First Fridays] for these last seven or eight years, it looks like there's a lot more stores. When I first went it seemed like a lot of the shops were empty...like a lot of spaces were for rent you know...it doesn't seem like it now, lots of restaurants, the parks are just beautiful...to see those grow and evolve has been really beautiful...and to see a few newer high-end restaurants like J. Smith's to leave Bennington and come to our downtown... that's been really nice.

The aesthetic changes in the downtown were noted by participants who are shoppers as well as those who own businesses. Speaking to the visual changes within the downtown area, Bradley opened up about what he has heard, stating "It was a scary spot downtown, so much has changed since the 1990s. I wasn't here but people tell me---[it was] destitute. It's changed dramatically, it's become a nice, livable space." The notion of viability was also brought up by Greg, who has observed sweeping visual changes, yet still sees a lack of residents and visitors in the area as a problem for revitalization efforts. He explained,

G: So much has happened, there's so much to do downtown now.... Bowery park, so much is walkable, there used to be nothing to do downtown---people have more things to do, but still not that many more people coming downtown, there aren't enough people who live downtown.

According to Greg, though there have been a lot of positive changes with revitalization, there is still a lot more needed in the downtown area, including full-time residents, for it to become a more viable destination.

Much like the idea that there is a different feeling from block to block, specific parts of downtown have experienced changes that business owners and shoppers alike have noticed. Janet, who works and shops downtown, talked about the positive changes

she has witnessed in regards to the look of the entire downtown, and on one block in particular, over the past thirty years:

J: My office is across the tracks, you know the tracks on Oak Street, and you know that's not an area you used to go to, back in 1990 you wouldn't dare cross those tracks, you know...sketchy people, sketchy businesses....Now you know you've got Lombardi's, Table 10, Marshalls...you know a lot happening...umm, and I'd say even 10 years ago if you'd go downtown on a Friday night there wasn't much happening, now if you go downtown on a Friday night it's like New York City.

Although the majority of participants in this study, whether shoppers or business owners, perceive the appearance of the downtown area to be improved and have observed positive changes, some hold differing perspectives. For example, Evelyn thinks “They need to spruce things up, I mean they're trying to make some storefronts look like there's things here when there really aren't...it feels so desolate.” Perceptions about revitalization efforts in the downtown are primarily positive, but it was noted that revitalization has been occurring for a prolonged period of time. Tim indicated that “I've lived here for 21 years and I swear the revitalization stuff has been trying to go on for like 15 years.” It appears that a lengthy revitalization process means that people have been slow to see the improved offerings available downtown.

While the changes downtown have drastically impacted several participants' opinions of the area, others still express concerns about safety. Evelyn noted that “At night I don't want to park in the garages...it's too dark, and still looks sketchy to me” suggesting that while she may feel comfortable coming downtown to shop during the day, she experiences some hesitation during the evening hours. Interestingly, some

participants who are business owners talked about how busy the downtown area is at night. Greg and Samantha revealed that the revitalization has caused so many changes downtown that they have seen a shift both in terms of who is coming into the brewery and in terms of the time of day that crowds come and go. In particular, Greg noted the abundance of late night crowds:

G: It used to be earlier in the evening, just hanging out you know, but we're getting less of that and more of the late-night crowd, or...now, it's a different crowd too, it's younger, people barhop, I mean, I guess it's great for the city overall but for us, we've seen our revenue go down overall.

Greg observed that while the changes in the downtown have been positive for the city and for some business owners, he feels they have negatively impacted his brewery.

Alternately, it is the drastic changes cited by Greg that prompted other participants to take the plunge and establish businesses they had been thinking about opening for years. Margaret said:

M: It seemed like things were starting to change so we started thinking about it...and then...I don't know, it's just hard to describe it's you know...neighborhoods like when you're looking for houses, you just get that feeling about it being right.

For Margaret, the changes she has witnessed in the downtown are positive, and those changes, coupled with the unique space she found in the area, encouraged her to go ahead and set up shop there.

Unique Spaces and Places

Although it is evident that participants are aware of the visual changes that have been made to the downtown over the years, perceptions vary regarding what these changes mean for the uniqueness of the place, while others talked about future changes. Sabine, who owns a boutique, relies on customers that come downtown for cultural offerings and talked about the upcoming performing arts center that is due to open in the next couple of years. Sabine revealed how the addition of this venue to the downtown area might positively impact her store:

S: I'm super excited about the performing arts center which I think will be great, the Claremont Theater is right here and when they have events, that's kind of our core customer...so I'm excited for that.

The addition of the performing arts center to the downtown landscape is not the only thing that participants think will be a potential contributor to the changes in store. Liam spoke about the unique festivals held in the downtown area and how the crowds attending festivals and regular events positively impact his business. Liam exuded a sense of confidence and vision for the area, explaining,

L: Ultimately my goal is if you come to a festival in downtown for First Fridays...like this past one, I want to see that every weekend and maybe...every day at some point, and every weekend...just people out, doing things...what that will take, I'm not exactly sure but that is my dream for downtown. It might be another 10 years but, it's doable.

While Liam thinks that festivals and events are the key to bringing crowds to the downtown area, Bradley thinks that in order for the downtown area to be more viable, more utilitarian amenities are needed, instead of just unique offerings. Bradley stated:

B: It's got to be more than just nightlife, the downtown needs a good hardware store...things for peoples' everyday lives, retail, clothing.... I don't think we need more bars.....We need people living downtown, that would be amazing...and tourists. Bookstores thrive on tourists!

Although Bradley's response specifically points to the need for more functional types of retail, the overall desire for more retail offerings, unique or not, in the downtown area is a sentiment echoed by nearly all of the participants who are business owners. For example, Sabine said, "I'd like to see more retail downtown so that people could come down on Saturdays and just shop.... If we could get a few more shops then maybe it could become more of a shopping destination." Abigail shared similar ideas about the need for more retail offerings in the downtown, suggesting:

A: If we could generate some additional buzz of *Hey a new place opened downtown, come check it out*, I don't really care what it is, I just want them to come downtown and see what all there is to do. When you appreciate all that has gone on here and what's still here...that businesses are still operating and providing services downtown...it's pretty amazing.

Although participants who are shoppers shared the same desire to have more retail options in the downtown area, they also shared some frustrations about the uniqueness and how it negatively impacts their desire for practical goods. Whitney described how she is somewhat disappointed with downtown:

W: The worst is that there just aren't enough places. I mean you can't really spend a day downtown shopping, there are a ton of places to eat or if you want a drink, sure, but for shopping there really are only a handful of places and some of them just aren't my style, so...I mean, it's great if I want to buy a gift or just wander around, but for really shopping, like clothes or shoes, I can't...

Interestingly, Cara who is a store manager, even suggested a need for chain retailers as a way to help bring shoppers downtown, indicating her desire for different types of stores such as “Big box or bigger retailers like the Gap, or places like that. It would be great if they come downtown eventually.” Although the uniqueness of downtown seems appealing to many, it also leaves some participants feeling that they cannot make their “everyday” purchases there. Overall, the perception is that more is still needed in the downtown, and in particular, retail stores that could add to the functionality of the area. The feeling is that these additions would positively impact the entire downtown as well as the businesses within it, as it would help the downtown to look more alive and vibrant than it currently does.

According to the participants, unique store offerings in the downtown are not the only elements offering aesthetic appeal. Visual aspects, including the buildings, also offer appeal. When asked about his choice in location for establishing a bookstore, Bradley replied, “You could just see it...you know what I mean, the beautiful expanse, the old building, and downtown was essential.” That is, the physical building and surrounding structures in the downtown area were important to his vision of opening a bookstore. For Bradley, the visual elements of the downtown and the buildings are primary. Alongside old buildings, Cara, the manager of a boutique, talked about other

elements contributing to the unique character and appeal of the downtown area, including public art and parks. She explained,

C: Downtown seems to be booming, not just businesses but neat things going on...parks, art, with the murals that are coming onto empty facades of buildings with little jean sculptures that are throughout the city. It's just a fun place to be.

For Cara the unique elements, such as the public art shown in Figures 7-9, add to the unique “look” of downtown.



Figure 7. Jeans Sculpture (photo by author)



Figure 8. Mural 1 in Downtown (photo by author)



Figure 9. Mural 2 in Downtown (photo by author)

Several participants also noted the differences in the buildings and store spaces. In particular, Bradley’s bookstore is one store that participants frequently noted for the unique character. Juliette said, “I hate Barnes and Noble. The Blue Chair is great, you

know...it's so quaint, so cute with the coffee bar, the window displays....I love the atmosphere.” Similarly, Evelyn shared how the visual aspects of shopping in Bradley’s bookstore and other retailers in the downtown are significant to her shopping experiences, indicating, “I love the old buildings downtown, it's really beautiful. The bookstore, that *everything* store...it looks like my grandmother's basement, The Blue Chair, makes me want to hang out and linger.” Whitney, who also talked about how the look of things lures her downtown, stated, “I like coming into the stores downtown, even if I'm not buying anything, I just like to look around....The atmosphere, that's definitely better here, you get the old buildings, the feeling of the main street, tree-lined streets, the historic signs.” Violet shared similar sentiments about how the aesthetic aspects of the downtown area impact her shopping experience. She explained “The outdoor component mixed with the architecture of the buildings, it provides a nostalgic, refreshing, and unique experience that I enjoy.” Business owners shared the same feelings, but usually in regards to the question of why they chose the downtown area as the place to establish their businesses. For instance, the unique elements of the space housing Margaret’s antique store were fundamental to her decision to buy the building. She explained,

M: We wanted a place where we could have an office and retail space. It was a vision that it could become both...it's a cool space, the door back here, the shutters...high ceilings. This place has the metal doors, it had the driveways that came in...we could visualize the space it could become and we were up for that.

It was important for Margaret to first identify the part of downtown she wanted to set up shop in, and then she considered the characteristics of the building and how they would lend themselves to the kind of space she wanted to create.

Boutique owner Annalisa reminisced on her search for retail space and described why she chose the downtown: “I looked at strip malls, at other locations in town, but I love the character of the old buildings, a historic building, and in a downtown...once I saw this place, I just knew.” More specifically, Annalisa discussed how she considered the alternative of an established shopping center or a lifestyle center, poignantly suggesting that, “The lifestyle center that has been around the longest is the downtown area. Your main street that runs through your city or town, and now they're being cultivated, but really it's just the original lifestyle center.” Annalisa discussed the recent trend of outdoor shopping centers and downtown shopping, including the differences the latter offers not only to customers, but to business owners, who have the benefit of looking out windows and watching people go by, rather than looking out into a shopping mall. Interestingly, Sabine suggested that the aesthetic aspect of the downtown area is important for shopping, stating, “Our culture as a whole is steering away from malls. They want to be outside. They want to be walking around.”

Sabine actually owns two stores, one downtown and the other in a strip mall in another city. Sabine described the very strong opinions that her customers have of the two stores, and how location and aesthetic features contribute to these perceptions. She explained that even though she has attempted to re-create the look and feel of the original downtown location in the strip mall store, customers show a clear preference for one or the other:

S: The vibe of the store there [in the strip mall] is very different. This one [downtown space], is in an old building with more charm, whereas that one is in a built-out shopping center space. We tried to keep the colors on the walls the

same, the merchandise is more or less the same...everything, but when people cross over stores they have very strong opinions to which one they like the best.

Sabine has learned from her customers that the visual aspects of the store matter to the shopping experience. She indicated that it also impacts the type of merchandise customers gravitate toward and the traffic patterns she observes, despite her attempts to keep the stores as similar as possible.

Some participants just seem to like the authenticity of shopping downtown. For example, Mary's simple statement "I just prefer it to mall shopping," and Greta's straightforward reasoning that "It's not the mall" were summarized by Kayla who added "The architecture of downtown feels, or is more real than a prefab shopping mall."

Among participants who are shoppers there was little discussion of exactly how the aesthetics impacted their downtown shopping experiences, however, opinions were very positive about the overall aesthetic appeal inherent to the place. For participants who are business owners, it was evident that the overall "look" of the downtown and the character of the places and spaces within the downtown area are important factors, and particularly when they decided to establish their businesses. Although the visual appeal of the downtown area is a factor that many participants commented on, the meaning of the downtown area and what it represents as a part of the overall "shopping local" experience is something that also came up frequently in conversation.

Symbolic

According to participants, the revitalized downtown and the stores within it provide more than functional and hedonic benefits, and are appreciated beyond their

aesthetic qualities. As discussed in Chapter II, people develop emotional bonds with a place and the meaning it holds (Kleine & Baker, 2004). The symbolic function of a place usually develops over time and through repeated visits (Relph, 1985; Tuan, 1974, 1977). The notion that the downtown area and places within it hold symbolic meaning emerged from the data collected with both shoppers and store owners. Specifically, four primary issues surfaced as important to understanding the ways in which participants attach symbolic meaning to the downtown and the stores there: (a) *A Part of My Life*, (b) *The Meaning of Local*, (c) *A Safe Place*, and (d) *A Place for Diversity*. Each is discussed in the following sections.

A Part of My Life

Participants who are business owners often discussed how the business holds symbolic meanings for them. For some, it is almost as though their stores exist because of the symbolic representation they hold. For example, when Bradley was asked why he chose to open his bookstore, he replied,

B: I had a bookstore in Buffalo, NY for a long time and then moved to Claremont with no interest in opening a bookstore, but people knew I had a bookstore in Buffalo...and no self-respecting city can claim anything without an independent bookstore downtown, and a downtown space becomes the center of political, intellectual and literary life, that mirrors what a good independent bookstore should be. So, I just knew I had to.

For Bradley, deep-seated beliefs about the meanings that an independently-owned book store holds for the downtown area prompted his decision to open the store.

Other participants shared different, but equally compelling, symbolic motives for owning or operating their businesses. Abigail talked about how she never really intended

to own the store that she once managed, but the circumstances surrounding the future of the store made her fully appreciate the importance of the place. Abigail explained:

A: The store was going to close if I didn't buy it... I was disappointed and didn't want it to close but I sat on it for a week or two...I talked to my fella to make sure he was okay with me expanding my yarn addiction...it's worth it I think to have a place that is still accessible for people who have questions or want to learn more about different kinds of crafts that some of the big box stores don't offer.

Abigail's explanation of why she chose to take on ownership of the yarn store reveals an understanding of what a store like this means to the community, and especially to the people who patronize it.

Although several participants operate their businesses out of the desire to offer something to others, a few discussed how the business provides something for themselves. For example, Cassandra, the store manager at Liam and Eric's boutique, talked about how the store provides a place for her to sell her products, and transitioned into a place that accommodates her personal life as well. Cassandra offered, "I sell my hats here....I started making hats, so I started working here, since I was always here." Cassandra went on to talk about how her life has changed over the years that she has worked at the boutique, and how her newest life change, motherhood, has been accommodated in a meaningful way by the business. Cassandra pointed to a bassinet behind the cash wrap counter and said, "My son is here with me. How many places can you say that...bringing your baby in." As another example, Annalisa talked about how her business provides her with the opportunity to fulfill a lifelong career dream, after many years of working in corporate retail. In particular, Annalisa's passion for visual

merchandising and merchandise selection was fundamental to her decision to open the business, as this venture would allow her the creative freedom that is not afforded by the more corporate retail setting. Annalisa talked about how her store came from a love for vintage items and for creating visual settings:

A: Having worn a lot of vintage myself and coming from a theater background, my love for that was always a passion and, I had a professor sit down with me once and say, *You're a storyteller but not in writing it necessarily...you're a visual communicator and you like to tell stories with objects*. That is why I love old things, they each have a story to tell and each piece is unique...and that's what I love to do.

Annalisa's boutique offers her the opportunity to select the pieces that inspire her the most, and to create a setting within the store that shares this inspiration with her customers.

It is clear that the symbolic value of the locally-owned businesses in the downtown are not limited to the store owners. Participants who are shoppers also shared how specific stores in the downtown offer them memories and meanings. When talking with participants about where and why they shop downtown, James reminisced about how downtown represents back-to-school shopping at a store that was once a mainstay in the downtown area: "I remember downtown when the only place there was...was like Bakers, to grab your t-shirts and your jeans before school started for the year." James also described how the memory of another downtown store reminds him of an old girlfriend, "I dated someone who shopped at that place across from Tanner's...I would go there and look for gifts, now when I see it..." James trailed off without finishing his

thought or offering any further explanation, but it is clear that the store holds symbolic meaning for him because it reminds him of someone important in his life.

Other participants shared less specific memories about the businesses downtown, but were quick to mention the places they visit when they go downtown, such as Jasmine, who quickly rattled off “All Good Things, Free Spirit, and The Blue Chair.” When asked why, Jasmine replied that “Downtown...it’s just different, the stores and what they have too, and I like to have different things, not be run of the mill...” For Jasmine, some of the stores downtown are symbolic to the extent that they facilitate her desire to be different. Similarly, Maddison indicated that she shops downtown multiple times a week, and, while she does not necessarily spend a lot of money downtown, she frequents the coffee shop at least two or three times each week. For Maddison, the coffee shop is more than a place to get her caffeine fix, she described it as a place that is “More inspiring than always sitting at home...people studying, people working, life is happening there.”

While it seems natural that a place such as a coffee shop that one frequents multiple times a week would hold symbolic meaning, places that are not visited often also seem to hold deep meaning for participants. For example, another shopper in the downtown area, Gloria, indicated that one store in particular holds deeply symbolic meaning for her in spite of rarely visiting it: “Schafer’s....I obviously don’t shop there every day, but we got our wedding rings there...I can’t walk by Schafer’s without thinking about it, if they closed I would probably take it as some kind of bad omen [laughs].” Gloria’s answer clearly indicates that the symbolism attached to a place, and in this case a locally-owned retail store, is not always the result of frequent visits.

Some participants talked about the symbolism of the downtown more broadly, and what it means to the overall city. Michelle said, “For me it is just kind of the hub of the city, the center of activity, that's the way I think of it and maybe it's my age and I'm just used to that, I don't know...” Michelle continued “Right in one area we have the library, the museum, the Cultural Arts Center, we have the kids’ museum across the street and it is a wonderful collection of culture and a great place to be.” Clearly, Michelle views the downtown as the cultural center for the city. Likewise, Courtney pointed out that the downtown is “A place of culture, it offers more new experiences, and it has a bit more variety for fun...and just different perspectives.” Courtney’s interpretation of the city includes not only its cultural offerings but the extent to which it offers shoppers something new or different. Symbolic representations of the downtown area include much more than product selection, or the aesthetic appearance of the place. Indeed, they reflect memories, bonds between people, and even the ideas or opportunities they inspire.

The Meaning of Local

Alongside meanings specific to individual stores, the notion of *local* is also a key aspect for many participants due to the prevalence of locally-owned businesses in the downtown area. One shopper, Ralph, simply stated that “Locally-owned stores give a city its culture.” He clearly ascribes a great deal of meaning to the notion of local. Michelle talked about how shopping locally downtown makes her feel more connected to the community, stating “To me other shopping areas, like in the outlying areas, there really isn't a connection to community like there is down here” referring to her experiences when shopping downtown. The idea of a connection to the community was

shared by many participants who are shoppers, and in a variety of ways. Maddison suggested that shopping at the locally-owned businesses is meaningful to her because doing so supports the greater good, as it helps to “Keep money within our community.” Likewise, Jasmine stated that shopping locally means “The money goes to local owners instead of corporations.” Others noted that shopping locally may directly impact the specific makers or artists. Greta noted “The connection feels more tangible if it is fair trade or a local craftsperson.”

From a business-owner’s perspective, Sabine discussed how her store, which aims to only sell locally-made and fair-trade merchandise, is a rarity in the retail landscape. As she sees it:

S: People like to support local and they like to buy handmade and Fairtrade and All Good Things as a store is not...it's just not a popular type of store in America anymore. We're boutique and more stores are chains...there's not a lot of local anymore and our customers tell us that.

Shoppers and business owners alike shared that they assign more meaning to purchases made from local businesses. Annalisa, both a store owner and someone who shops in the downtown area, suggested that for her, “Buying local is more meaningful.”

Violet talked about how when she buys something locally, the meaning of the experience becomes about offering support for something bigger than herself, stating, “I’m participating in the community and buying something that’s part of the culture of the city when I buy locally.” For participants, supporting the culture and community are tied to the idea of local products and local shopping, and such meanings often emerged throughout the data as a reason for buying local and shopping downtown. For example,

Juliette exclaimed, “When I buy local, the money is staying here instead of going god knows where...hell, probably China!”

What is meant by the term “local” seems to vary from participant to participant, and rarely offers strict parameters. For example, when talking about local dining, Luanne described “local” as “Small and well-chefed places,” indicating that this is the reason she chooses to dine downtown. In contrast to Luanne, some participants are specific in their definition of “local.” For example, when Courtney was asked what “local” means to her, she responded that “Local means within 50 miles of me.” Though Courtney has the most precise viewpoint of what “local” constitutes, others, like Juliette, admitted that “It’s not always possible to buy only locally-made, but then I try to keep it within the state.”

As a business owner, Abigail extends her understanding of the term “local” to include other states as well. She described her support of a vendor in Pennsylvania and what it means to her to support a local artisan,

A: I've got a large order I placed a couple of months ago for three grand that went to an indie dyer out of Pennsylvania. Now that's close, that's local...I didn't have to pay Italy to get these yarns, that they're only a couple hours drive up the road is a big deal.

Abigail’s interpretation of “local” includes consideration of where her products are sourced, and therefore her conception of local is broader than that of other participants.

In the same vein, when asked about buying locally, Ethan responded that he does not specifically buy *local*, but that he only buys vintage, American-made goods. Ethan went into detail on this point:

E: Things that used to be made so well here, but there aren't even suppliers anymore or people who have the capabilities to make things...so it's funny to like get these authentic American products because you'll see things like quintessential American buckle styles from the 1930's and I'll see it and then see it's made in China or Japan, so tough luck, I move on to the next thing. And I know that narrow-woven labeling doesn't even exist here anymore, so anyone who has that but with "Made in the USA" branding...I know that they're importing labels, looking behind the curtain you see how inauthentic something is, even though it says made in the USA, but every component is usually a foreign sourced item, it creates a big reluctance on my part to buy things. I obsess over it.

Ethan is a very well-informed shopper in terms of his knowledge of “Made in the USA” and extremely aware of how different people and different companies interpret this statement. For Ethan, it is the “Made in the USA” designation, as a type of shopping local, that determines what he will and will not purchase.

For participants who are downtown shoppers, the idea of local is less about the geographic conception of local, or the distance a product has traveled, than it is about the symbolism it has because it is either locally-made or purchased from a local business owner. Indeed, the idea that locally-sourced products are more “unique” frequently emerged in the data. Per Juliette, the uniqueness stems from both the stores and products, saying “Really all of the places down here are pretty unique, it's kind of amazing for the size of our city....And the stuff you can get downtown is unique.” Renee echoed this sentiment, stating that “Local often has more unique offerings and more character too.” A similar observation was made by Craig, who also ties his understanding of local back to the businesses downtown, stating, “There are some unique places downtown...like the antique stores and artisan shops...things that you won't find elsewhere.” Finally, Sally

suggested that to her the concepts are one and the same, and that shopping locally is about finding “Unique items being sold by people who live in the community.”

Although the exact definition of “local” and “local shopping” differ among participants, and are concepts of more importance to some than others, the connection to the place, or the products sold in the place, make for meaningful products and shopping experiences among them. The ways by which participants symbolically described the downtown as a safe place is discussed next.

A Safe Place

A downtown area may conjure up images of a bustling city, and for some, such images may be cause for concern. For example, Victoria detailed how the downtown area prompts the issue of safety, whether literal or symbolically,

V: I'm originally from Chicago and, ummm, our downtown used to feel safe and comfortable... You'd meet interesting people and do some shopping, but now that has changed... I mean I left several years ago and have lived in several other places, but when I got here, our downtown started to feel like that to me again...

Victoria's memories of Chicago helps to make the downtown in her new city feel more like home, as they offer a sense of reassurance and a reminder of something she once knew and enjoyed. She feels relatively safe downtown, and it prompts memories of the downtown Chicago of the past. She explained:

V: I feel like I don't have to clench my purse when I'm here, and the shops are cool, the people seem fun.... So it's giving me that feeling again, like, huh, this is what I liked about home [Chicago] before, so.... I feel like we're connected to Claremont now that we've found the downtown area.

Feeling safe is something that some of the participants who are business owners also mentioned, especially relating to the more symbolic notions of safety. For example, Annalisa shared how her personal experiences with not always feeling like she really fit in actually impacted the type of business she created. She explained,

A: I wanted... that my own store would become a very safe space for people. I wouldn't say I'm an outsider or have been, I've had friends in lots of different groups, but I've known what it's like to feel intimidated and like...I don't always fit, so I've wanted to create this place for people of all different interests and backgrounds and arenas to feel like they can come in and be who they are and it appeals to them and they're welcome and they're safe.

A similar desire was shared by Katharine, who manages a coffee shop. She described the type of place that she both hopes and expects the coffee shop to be:

K: This place has sort of a safe space feel to it. Everything is acceptable, is accepted...as long as they are accepting and respectful of everybody else...that's our only real expectation, our only real rule, whatever you're into, whatever you believe, whatever...as long as you create the space so others can have that too. That's a big thing and you see that in the people who come in here and who work here...it breaches the idea of people of a feather flock together, it's a melting pot here.

Like Katherine, other participants who are business owners think that their businesses are bringing together like-minded people and offering them a safe place to connect. Abigail talked about the customers who come into her yarn store and sit down and knit or crochet during business hours:

A: You want to hang out with and get to know people who feel the same way you do about a certain subject whether it's religion or volunteering or your crafting

and something creative. You want to connect with people that way and this place can be that for people.

Abigail continued by describing how a place where people with common interests can gather offers something to customers that they are not getting in other areas of their lives:

A: I get people who want to come down and just talk about yarn...instead of their family who rolls their eyes and says...*Yarn again, this isn't my thing*, but here...we can talk about color, different pattern ideas, size issues and I get it, they want to be around someone who will listen, I get the feeling so many of my customers don't get that at home.

Abigail's yarn store not only sells merchandise, but offers a space for like-minded people to come together for learning, support, and building a sense of community. In the same vein, Greg and Samantha talked about the kind of place that they envision their brewery being and the variety of ways the space is used:

G: We want to be a community gathering place, we strive to do that. So...we get a lot of groups coming in on a regular basis, we have a running club on Tuesday, music groups that come in and do a jam session, a Piedmont music society that does one too, every...uh month maybe. We do events to raise money for nonprofits, other groups that just use the space for meetings...political candidates, small companies, science club meets here, a bunch of different groups and we encourage and like to see that, [the university] archives hosts a different meeting each month here...they heard about other university archives departments doing that at a brewery, so that's what they do here...grab objects and display them with boards explaining and sharing the history about them, they've been doing that for almost a year here, people from [another university] even reached out to us here and ummm, they're wanting to do that here for their archives---they've also brought in other schools, we're geeky and like that kind of stuff here.

Greg and Samantha's interest in the broader community and ensuring that their space can be used, free of charge, for groups and meetings is an important part of business

ownership for them. However, at the same time, Samantha pointed to the drawbacks of having an accessible space that is known for hosting events and being open to the community. She explained, “It gets strange, what people expect of you. They will call and just ask a question and suddenly they assume we're closing the taproom for them and their event,” referring to a recent situation they encountered when a customer called and inquired about the possibility of hosting an event but never confirmed the event or followed-up. When she subsequently showed up at the brewery, she was upset to find that the brewery was open for business as usual, rather than closed for her proposed event.

Overall, the symbolic meaning of downtown as a safe space, including individual businesses as well as the downtown as a whole, surfaced as important to participants’ experiences. For some of the business owners, it is about offering a place where people feel accepted, while for shoppers, there is a sense of security that comes from the acceptance they feel when visiting the establishments and being downtown.

A Place for Diversity

Participants view downtown as a safe place and one that embraces uniqueness. At the same time, it is also a place for everyone and a place where more diversity exists as compared to other parts of the city. Historically, the downtown area has been known for being the location of a major Civil Rights movement event in the South, and the downtown area is situated as a sort of midpoint between historically racially segregated neighborhoods in the city. However, shoppers and business owners frequently commented on the diversity, whether racial or otherwise, that they experience in the

downtown area, particularly when compared to the rest of the city. The notion that the downtown is a shared space, no matter what one's demographics are, and that everyone co-exists there together, is a commonly shared viewpoint among participants.

When asked why they like to come downtown, some participants did not specifically call out racial diversity, but their answers may be interpreted as suggesting as much. For example, one reason Alex gave for coming downtown is because "Different types of people seem to be downtown, so it's a more diverse mix of people maybe, and I like that." Other participants who are shoppers elaborated more on how they view the diversity in the downtown area. For example, when Tim was asked about the people he tends to see when he is shopping downtown, he offered:

T: We are more racially diverse downtown, we are accepting in this city, for the most part it is a diverse mix of people especially when there are events going on downtown. But from a Saturday shopping experience I think it still caters to maybe a white audience or maybe not white per se but higher socioeconomic class... I think it's definitely more racially diverse than other parts of the city, though if you go south of town it's very African-American. In the north it's very opposite, so downtown it's kind of a center point and offers the opportunity for that, but the business offerings and that... I don't know it's hard to say but it seems like they are targeted to a higher socioeconomic class. I don't see as many African-Americans or maybe I am just missing it... Maybe there are opportunities to make it more diverse...

Tim noted that he sees more diversity when he is downtown, but he perceives product offerings to still be lacking diversity and discloses the opinion that there are still things that need to be done to increase the diversity in the downtown area. Likewise, Rachel offered her opinions on the diversity she experiences downtown:

R: It's a space where you can see everybody...I mean the city as a whole is pretty segregated but in the downtown, it's an area where you can see everyone, it feels like it's taken advantage of by everybody---age-wise, race-wise, I don't really feel that in other parts of Claremont. You can go to other parts, like Campton Park, and it's all rich white people, so I really appreciate that like downtown...to be around people who are not from the same neighborhood.

Along with some of the shoppers, some of the business owners also commented on the racial diversity in the downtown area. Bradley expressed his delight in the diversity and compared it to his former city of residence, stating, “I do find that downtown is a nice racially mixed bag---Buffalo, New York is very segregated still...white businesses, black businesses... obviously not exclusively, but, this is like lovely neutral ground where everyone hangs out together.” As a business owner, Bradley sees a less segregated downtown than what he was used to in New York, but did not comment specifically on the racial makeup of his customer base. Interestingly, the only people to comment on the racial diversity in the downtown area were Caucasian shoppers and business owners. None of the African American participants mentioned diversity or brought up the issue of race during the interviews.

While conducting observation in the downtown area, I found that diversity was indeed noticeable, but at the same time, what I observed did not necessarily include a lot of socialization between races. I witnessed several instances of friendly “Hello’s” between people of all races, including exchanges of brief pleasantries, but in general, groups of people shopping and dining tended to be divided along racial and ethnic lines. Contrary to Bradley’s experience of “Everyone hangs out together,” one experience in

particular reveals just how different perceptions of racial diversity in the downtown may be. The following passage from my field notes captures this idea:

First Fridays are usually wildly popular downtown, especially when we have good weather but this First Friday was different. A historically black university in town was having Homecoming, that being the case I just expected it to be an even busier Friday night. Instead, it turns out the city decided to change First Fridays and hold it on the second Friday of the month because it overlapped with Homecoming. Because I already had plans to attend I went downtown anyways and experienced a very different Friday night downtown. The streets and sidewalks were packed---busier than I have ever experienced downtown. Not only that, the racial makeup was probably 95% or greater, African American, another big difference from the average First Friday where the racial makeup is probably more skewed to a Caucasian majority, even on a typical non-First Friday Friday evening there would have been a lot more Caucasians but tonight there were almost none. I walked through several blocks downtown and landed at a brewery in one of the newly revitalized blocks of downtown. The brewery was empty. The brewery is never empty, and especially not on a beautiful Friday evening. Usually their patio is so busy that you can't find a seat. Meanwhile, across the street Tapcade [an arcade/bar] had a DJ and people were packed onto the patio. I went inside and there were only 2 customers. My companion and I ordered a beverage and chose to sit outside on the patio listening to the music across the street. During the hour we sat on the patio only one more guest came into the brewery while the party continued across the street. After having a drink, we walked back through the downtown area and noticed that several businesses that were usually open had closed early on this particular Friday evening. We had no problem getting a table during prime dining hours at Jake's Downtown, usually a popular and busy place on Friday nights. There were only three other tables occupied during our entire dinner.

After the event I got the feeling that, although everyone may indeed utilize the downtown area, overall it still appears to be quite segregated, and it seemed as though some people were actually avoiding downtown on this particular evening. This specific finding may underscore the notion that everyone may come downtown, but obviously not at the same time, for the same purposes, or to visit the same places.

In summary, as discussed in this chapter, the significance of place in the context of local shopping in a revitalized downtown embodies many facets of the experience. Functional aspects of the downtown, including the product assortment and ease of parking are integral to experiences of participants who are shoppers and business owners and at times may be seen as disadvantages. However, while some negative functional aspects about the downtown may exist, many hedonic and aesthetic aspects, such as the overall feeling participants experience and the appeal of the historic buildings, seem to captivate and lure people downtown, creating positive experiences for most participants. Likewise, symbolically, the downtown area and the stores within it help to create a unique place, potentially uniting diverse groups of people and providing a multitude of experiences for shoppers and business owners alike.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the first conceptual area used to structure the interpretation of the data, *Place*. Interview and observation data were interpreted through four emergent themes that help to explain the complexity and range of *Place*. The four themes offer insight into what it means to “shop local” in the revitalized downtown, including practical and emotional reasons, as well as aesthetic and symbolic reasons. In the next chapter, I discuss the second conceptual area, *People*, with respect to what local shopping means within the revitalized downtown.

CHAPTER V

THEMATIC INTERPRETATION PART II: UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PEOPLE

In this chapter, the role of people relative to local retail stores is explored within the context of downtown revitalization. Through the data collected, topics related to participants as both shoppers and store owners, and their decisions to shop and/or own a business in the downtown area are examined. Obviously, people are the critical link in the chain of success for a revitalized downtown, therefore, the shoppers and business owners participating in this study are no exception. Based on the data collected for this study, and as discussed in Chapter II, consumption can be considered a form of activism (Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti & Bostrom, 2014; Nelson, Rademacher, & Paek, 2007; Sandovici & Davis, 2010). Specifically, socially conscious consumption is a form of consumer activism that involves individuals who feel that they can directly impact the marketplace through their consumption behaviors (Webster, 1975). Thus, the notion of shopping locally as a form of consumer activism, as it emerged in the data, is also explored in this chapter. The interpretation of data revealed three broad factors operating to define what shopping local means for participants: (a) *Shopping Local: What are the Costs?* (b) *What's So Great About Shopping Local?* and (c) *Shopping Local: The Outcomes*. Each factor is discussed in turn within the following sections.

Shopping Local: What are the Costs?

The data reveal that participants have a variety of reasons for shopping downtown and/or for setting up shop in the downtown area. While participants' perceptions as shoppers versus business owners seemed to differ, there are two emergent themes that help to shed light on their understanding of the costs related to local shopping in the downtown area. The first has to do with the product, in that the data revealed that (1) *Pricing is an Issue*, and the second has to do with the cost of the location downtown, or (2) *Keeping the Lights On*.

Pricing is an Issue

When it comes to shopping locally, one of the most commonly mentioned topics by participants, whether shoppers or store owners, is that of price differences between locally-owned retailers in the downtown and big box stores like Walmart or online retailers like Amazon. Thus, this particular theme reveals how participants interpret price differences when shopping locally. For example, when asked about shopping locally, Evelyn was quick to respond that the stores downtown are "All *very* expensive." Likewise, another shopper, Tina, indicated that she made very few purchases from locally-owned stores downtown because, as she states, "I pay attention to what's on sale and what's at Walmart because I just can't afford what I have to pay at the stores downtown. It's usually too expensive." While James also thinks that the purchases he makes downtown at local retailers cost more, he does see the value in what he buys, stating that when shopping at a men's boutique downtown, "It comes with a price tag, you get quality though...it's a lot more expensive than if you went to like, the Gap."

Other participants, such as Paul, talked about how they may limit their local shopping due to the prices. He explained,

P: I enjoy visiting and supporting locally-owned shops. Admittedly I don't make as many purchases at locally-owned shops because I can often get things cheaper elsewhere, but if they have something unique or the pricing is comparable, I will purchase it from a locally-owned business.

Indeed, the idea that items found in the stores downtown are priced higher than in other places is a common perception shared among most participants. Availability of discretionary income was sometimes offered as a reason for not shopping downtown. For example, Courtney explained why she does not shop locally as much as she would like to,

C: I'm a college student, a lot of my expenses are covered thanks to scholarships, but I still budget monthly. After groceries and bills, I only shop when I am free of homework and even then I kind of cap it at \$20 on a shopping trip, there's only so much I can get for that here.

Later in the discussion Courtney added "I am sometimes frustrated by the higher prices," indicating that she not only is limited regarding her budget, but reiterating the extent to which she thinks the prices downtown are higher than they are elsewhere, which is a deterrent.

In contrast, other participants feel that prices in the downtown stores are quite fair. Juliette articulated, "The stores downtown really aren't expensive, I mean some of the restaurants are pricier but the stuff you can get downtown is unique and it's priced well." Juliette's perception is that, outside of the restaurants, items in the stores

downtown are priced fairly for the value they offer. Other participants seem willing to pay the prices, however they also acknowledge that the prices may be a bit higher than what they would pay in other locations. However, as Mary pointed out, “I am very supportive and try to shop local when possible so long as the pricing isn’t too much more expensive than I can find online.”

Interestingly, the idea that locally-owned stores offer more unique merchandise seems to be the way that many participants rationalize paying higher prices but more often it seems to be a deterrent. Laurie explained that, “Some have unique selections, but pricing is often an issue.” Interestingly, Valerie indicated that she does not actually buy much when she is downtown, however the *idea* of local shopping is something she is fond of: “I like the idea of locally-owned stores but...sometimes they are very specific to a target market or a higher price point, so...I don’t really buy much here.” This concept of looking but not buying was also brought up by Tim, who mentioned:

T: You really wonder how some of these places stay in business because the prices of the goods aren’t cheap and they don’t get large volumes of shoppers...I *feel* like I shop downtown a lot but when it comes down to it, I’m not sure if I really buy that much.

Tim’s comment demonstrates that he, too, feels positively about shopping downtown, but perceives the prices to be high and so questions whether or not he actually spends much money shopping downtown.

Although the data reveal that participants, as shoppers, seem to view prices in downtown stores to be higher than stores in other areas, one business owner, Margaret, discussed how she determines prices in her store. She shared how she feels about pricing

items in her antique store and that she is sometimes willing to negotiate prices with customers:

M: I don't like people who come in and go *What's the lowest you'll take on this?* It's usually the older white male antique dealers, and I'm like...*the lowest...\$25 and it's going up!* But if they say---*Ooooooh, my grandpa used to work for this company thirty years ago...*if there's a good sob story, I'm all over it. If it's personal, absolutely! I want to make them happy.

Although Margaret may be inclined to offer lower prices to customers based on their levels of attachment to a product, she also mentioned that she deliberately prices some items too high, explaining,

M: If you see something with a high price tag, it's probably because I want it, it's a *stay away price...*it's a *no one is going to pay that price for that.* Then if someone does, I have to tell myself...*Okay I guess that it is meant to be.*

Margaret's excerpts suggest that, for her, product pricing may not necessarily be related to product value, but instead to personal feelings about the product or the person making the purchase.

During my fieldwork, I observed what I perceive to be both fairly priced merchandise and some items that seem to carry a premium price tag, as the short passages from my field notes below indicate. The first note is a comment I jotted down after buying a cookie while observing at the café in the locally-owned bookstore:

Wow, I bought a peanut butter chocolate chip cookie...\$4, dang, that is one expensive cookie and honestly, it's not even amazing. I could have gotten a beer for \$4, not that I don't want a beer at 1pm, but at least \$4 for a beer is very fair, \$4 for a cookie seems kind of pricey.

In contrast, I found that some of the merchandise in Margaret's store is priced very fairly, even well below what one might expect. The passage below describes an antique chair I saw and thought about purchasing after interviewing Margaret:

I keep thinking about the cane chair in Margaret's store...how is it only \$32? I know exactly where I could put it, the wood is in great shape and it would be so quick and easy to recover the seat.

Much like the perception shared among participants who are shoppers, the idea that products cost more at locally-owned stores as compared to chain stores is something that some of the participants who are business owners also acknowledged. For example, Bradley joked about how he would like to respond to the complaints he hears from customers on this topic:

B: We think about getting t-shirts made that say *Yes you can get it cheaper* [laughs]. But what we're selling, if you will, is an experience that if you want this kind of store downtown and doing these kind of events, and is participating in the community as fully as we are, then there's a small price to pay, one extra dollar to pay, that's it, but it's still just the price on the cover the book. But I get it, I come from a family where you buy the cheapest thing, so I respect the economic reality of people's lives.

Although some participants who are store owners, like Bradley, are conscious of customers' budgets, others think that the products they carry are more worthwhile for their customers in the long run as compared to the less expensive alternatives. Liam proposed the following line of thinking, "The brands we tend to carry, once you've purchased one, and yes they are more expensive than others you could buy...but you won't be replacing it all the time." Other participants, such as Sabine, think that their

stores fill a niche. Sabine is not particularly worried about pricing, stating “They don't shop with us because we're the lowest price or because we're the most on trend---because we're not.” While Bradley, Liam, and Sabine all acknowledge somewhat premium pricing, they are also clear that offering the lowest prices is not a primary objective of their businesses.

Although many of the comments by participants who are shoppers referred to other stores or online pricing, only one store owner talked specifically about how Internet pricing impacts her business. Abigail mentioned that she often loses customers due to her pricing:

A: All of these companies you can order from online...and I have to compete with them, and sometimes I fail because the prices I've set to cover shipping and everything...I can't compete with someone who can give you a 30% discount for ordering \$100. I can't do that..[so it] makes a difference.

Abigail's comment reveals the economic reality that she faces as a brick and mortar small business owner, and how this reality sometimes involves lost sales.

Overall, the data reveal that product price is an important factor for participants when deciding to shop locally. Although the majority of participants in this study think that prices are higher downtown than they might find elsewhere, regardless of opinion, the topic of pricing almost always came up as an immediate topic of conversation among them. During the interviews, participants were not asked about prices, but those who are shoppers were quick to discuss this aspect specific to local shopping and freely shared this information, which indicates that it is a significant part of their experiences and their

perspectives on shopping locally. Those who are business owners clearly are accustomed to dealing with customer concerns about pricing.

Keeping the Lights On

As discussed in the previous section, shoppers in this study hold definite opinions about the prices on items found in locally-owned downtown retailers. Interestingly, while many customers have reservations about the price of items in the stores, the data also point to a disproportionately high cost of doing business downtown. That is, the data revealed that most of the local business owners who participated in this study are much less profitable than the participants who are shoppers believe them to be. Indeed, as Tim's earlier comment suggests, some of the business owners are in fact struggling financially. At the very least, high profit margins are not something they regularly enjoy.

While some shoppers shared frustrations regarding what they perceived to be unreasonably high prices, some of the business owners in this study were also not shy about sharing their own frustrations with running their businesses. John, owner of a gallery, painted the bleakest picture and even gave me financial data regarding where the business used to be compared with its current state. John shared that he thinks that the recession is still affecting his business and provided an example of the revenue the gallery used to generate each year compared to what it has been grossing over the past several years. He explained, "I used to do about \$300,000 a year...now...yeah, between 70 [thousand] and 90 [thousand] a year...it's not enough....I have a mortgage payment and a car payment....I need to eat and live..." John talked about the fact that lately he has been brainstorming and trying to come up with gallery memberships, or as he termed it,

“friends of the gallery” just to survive. John explained, “If I had...let's just say 50 members, paying \$500 [a year], that's enough to help stay solvent.”

John was very open with his financial concerns about the gallery and the impact of the economy on it. Other business owners’ frustrations centered on the volatility of the market in which they operate. For example, Greg and Samantha pointed to increasing competition as one of the biggest challenges they have been dealing with specific to the burgeoning and seemingly profitable craft beer industry. Although craft beer has exploded, as brewery owners, they find themselves trying to operate in a difficult situation with drastic shifts in the market, as more and more craft brewers join the marketplace. Greg shared how they have been forced to adapt their business model considerably during the three years they have been in business due to the vast changes affecting their particular industry:

G: [In the craft beer market] average growth was 700 barrels a year---I was shooting for *averageness*, not reaching for the stars, just average [laughs]. You work with the numbers you have...but it changed--FAST, I was working with historical data at least 5 years of data... an average craft brewery was growing by 700 barrels a year--some faster some slower, that was average. Now...average growth is about 300 barrels a year. Now, we're doing a little better than average, but not 700, our first year was 600, our 2nd was 1,000, this year we'll be about 1,400 probably so we're doing better than average, but what constitutes average now is 40% of what used to be, so we've had to completely shift our business model.

Greg’s concern about changes in the industry is just one more example of the cost of doing business independently. Greg’s partner Samantha added:

S: We’re old too...too old to get into this industry and be prepared for such sudden changes...it impacts our lives more than the 24 year olds who do this...We have

kids, we can't go belly up, we weren't expecting such drastic changes in the market, looking back...if we knew what we know now, I don't know if we'd have done it.

Samantha suggested that even though their business is part of a flourishing industry, and their brewery appears to be thriving, from an owner's perspective, they are operating in a very unpredictable situation. It was evident in talking with them that both Greg and Samantha experience a great deal of stress due to the market dynamics within their industry.

Although some business owners experience frustration, or even fear with regard to the financial side of the business, others appear to be less concerned. For example, when Margaret was talking about how she prices the merchandise in her store she laughed as she said "It's not about profit, no, no, no... it's a fair price. Sure I make a little bit of money." Margaret's store offers a mix of merchandise, some of which is sourced from estate sales and the rest are purchases she makes. In the latter case, people bring items to the store to sell to her. As she explained, "I try to tell people, *You will make more money if you sell it yourself or go onto Craigslist...* I try to be honest, I say *Take it home* or I'll tell them *I can only pay wholesale.*" Margaret added:

M: I just need *enough* money now, I don't need to make a killing. People tell me my prices are too low. I'm like...*I bought it low*, I don't need to make a ton of money on it, I need to make enough to pay my bills, so it's a win-win, you get it at a good price because I did too.

Margaret is clearly not in business for the money, which is good because she is not profiting a whole lot from her retail store.

In contrast, other participants who are small business owners did not mention anything related to the financial status of their businesses. For example, Bradley did not share whether his business is either flourishing or struggling, but did mention something he would like to see more of, which is, “Tourists. Bookstores thrive on tourists.” Tourists are something he feels is lacking in the downtown and would be a benefit for him financially. It is important to note that on each of my visits to Bradley’s bookstore, I observed it to be consistently the busiest of all of the field sites in this study.

Other participants indicated that their businesses are not terribly prosperous, yet seemed relatively nonchalant about the situation, such as Abigail, who explained that, “All of the profit has been going into keeping the store stocked....I just keep the lights on.” After this comment she went right onto another topic of discussion without missing a beat, appearing unaffected by the state of the business. Similar to that of Abigail’s business, Annalisa seemed prepared for accruing the bare minimum. She stated, “This first year is going to be tough, maybe a lot more than the first year...and starting this [the store] right before the holidays...ugh...I’m preparing myself mentally for January...I know it’s going to be rough,” referring to a well-known phenomenon in retail where post-holiday sales are typically low. Annalisa is clearly not expecting to profit significantly from her store in the very near future. However, this does not appear to deter her, and instead, she is already anticipating low profitability. The financial instability that participants face on a daily basis seemed to be a common factor among them, although to varying degrees.

Alongside perceptions of higher prices, participants who are business owners talked about how customers perceive their businesses to be very profitable. This interesting disconnect was underscored by the experiences of two business owners. John, the gallery owner who was just determined to simply “stay solvent” shared that, “I hear feedback sometimes...and there is the impression that I am quite wealthy, and this is a hobby or something...” John fears that this misconception about his financial status is not helping in regards to the drop in sales over the years. John actually offered to sell me his gallery for \$100,000:

J: I think a very reasonable figure, is maybe \$100,000...You could have everything... I mean there's \$100,000 worth of artwork here... I have some debts so if I sell it to you for \$100,000, \$80,000 will go for paying off all of my debt....I'd be the happiest person in the world just to pay off my debt.

Clearly John is not wealthy and, contrary to customer beliefs, his store is not simply a hobby.

John's experience is similar to a frustration that brewery owners Greg and Samantha also shared. When Greg and Samantha were discussing the most challenging aspect of owning a business in the downtown, Samantha exclaimed:

S: The perception that you have money! I wouldn't have guessed that, but people think you have money when you own a business. I mean, insurance has been a killer, I've considered going back to work just so that we can get insurance.

Samantha's comment reveals more than just what customers think about them, in that the reality is in fact actually fairly bleak.

In sum, the lack of profitability and the high cost of doing business as a local business owner in the revitalized downtown are topics that emerged across participants' experiences. Yet a distinct disconnect emerged between the perceptions of those participants who are shoppers and those who are local business owners. The former think the prices are high, while the latter often struggle to keep the lights on. Both hold specific views on the cost of local shopping. Although shoppers often feel that they pay unreasonable prices for items sold in stores downtown, owners of some of these stores are clearly not profiting as a result. The costs of local shopping discussed in this section are not the only significant aspects relative to people, therefore the next section includes discussion of the benefits.

What's So Great About Shopping Local?

Although little research has addressed the economic significance of locally-owned businesses, research that has been done indicates that a profusion of locally-owned businesses leads to more economic stability within a geographic area than that of chain store establishments (Lyson & Tolbert, 1996). Moreover, locally-owned businesses benefit the community (Mitchell, 2007) and provide distinction through product differentiation and more personalized kinds of social connections (Halebsky, 2004). Although among participants in this dissertation, the costs of shopping locally centered on some of the more concrete concepts, such as product pricing and business profitability, the benefits of shopping locally tended to be more abstract or intangible. For example, the notion of *differentiation* surfaced frequently, particularly when shoppers and local business owners talked about the benefits of local shopping. Interestingly, the

idea of differentiation also surfaced in importance, in the ways that participants placed importance on the relationships that develop between local business owners and their customers. Thus, the ideas central to understanding the benefits of shopping local are examined in depth through two themes comprising what is essentially two sides of the same coin: (1) *Something Different* and (2) *They Know Me*.

Something Different

The notion that the locally-owned retailers in this study have something a little bit different to offer their customers includes both the products they offer and the services they render. Inevitably, the tangible aspects of the products were the most frequently mentioned by shoppers. For example, Courtney talked about “quirky products,” when she described the benefits of shopping locally. Other participants echoed similar sentiments about the exclusive merchandise, such as Sally, who shared, “It’s always the unique items [that] I can find,” or Renee, who mentioned that she enjoys shopping locally because “Local stores often have more unique offerings and there’s just more character.” Still other participants, like Craig, talked about both the products and the stores as being differentiated from other retailers. He explained, “There are some really unique places downtown...like the antique stores, the galleries and artisan shops that you won’t find elsewhere, they’re kinda cool places.” This sentiment is similar to the way that Sadie thinks about the overall shopping experience downtown, saying, “It means that I get to buy unique or better-curated items when I shop downtown.”

Awareness of distinctive product and store offerings are only two of the benefits mentioned by shoppers. Maddison compared shopping local to online shopping, saying

that “It’s unique and...I buy it directly from the people who make it sometimes....and no shipping costs.” This immediacy, in terms of the product, alongside the fact that “The business is unique and your package is not going to be stolen off your front porch,” are, for Michelle, further benefits of local shopping. Emily likes the idea that “You can always find something different...it's never the same and you know everyone else won't have it.” For Emily, not only are the products unique, but the result is that she is differentiated from others in terms of what she has by shopping at locally-owned stores.

In tandem with finding unique products in distinctive stores, some participants mentioned service as another benefit of shopping local. Angie provided an example of the more personal customer service that many participants associate with the benefit of shopping at locally-owned retailers. Angie described shopping for a hat she just purchased:

A: I could go to Target and buy a hat for \$20, but I'm going to come here instead and let them measure my head, it's a whole experience here....I can come here and have the full service and experience and...you really feel like you've been taken care of, no offense to Target but I don't feel that way when I'm there.

For Angie, personalized service, as part of the shopping experience, is what prompts her to visit locally-owned stores. Other participants even talked about relationships with specific employees and owners as reasons why they choose to shop at local businesses.

Participants who are store owners and managers also talked about some of the different things that their stores offer to shoppers. Cara, a store manager, explained how customer experience is a key point of differentiation for many people. Cara stated:

C: Our customers receive personalized experiences when they shop at All Good Things...because we're small we try to treat our customers with...not like *sales*, but like friends when they come into the store, so they get a special experience when they're in here.

Although Cara thinks that the store itself offers something different by selling artisan and handcrafted goods, she suggested that "...There's a connection here, an awesome item with a really cool story and the personal experience." Indeed, it is the added value of the personalized experience that Cara thinks helps to enrich the connection for customers.

In a similar vein, Liam talked about how his store has something different to offer customers. Liam mentioned that though they do carry exclusive brands that no one else in the city carries, it is not just the brands, but the importance of what the brands represent that is meaningful to customers. Liam stated, "We sell things you just can't find in Claremont. Consciously made clothing like American Apparel, Alternative Apparel, Bella Canvas...brands that you don't find around here." I asked Liam to further explain why he wanted to carry brands that were "consciously made," as he had referred to them. Liam responded:

L: I think from the get-go, when we started Civic Threads [the former business name], we wanted to offer something that was...you knew when you were making a purchase that it was more than about making a purchase, and that we weren't just wanting you to just come in so we can cram new product down your throat---the *you've got to buy our stuff* feeling you get when shop in some stores. It had to be different stuff, but the way we sell it and *why* had to be different too.

Liam's explanation about the way that his store not only differentiates products, but also endeavors to provide a different shopping experience, is reflected in how he operates as a store owner and is likely noticeable to shoppers in his store.

Although the exclusivity of brands and the shopping experience are benefits that Liam thinks his store offers to customers, he also thinks that his store offers something for vendors. That is, according to Liam, "We want to be a hub for the makers and artists and people that are doing things in textiles as well." This feature is an important part of the business for Liam and a benefit that he thinks he is providing to his vendors. Sabine is another store owner who cares deeply about her vendors, which is why she likes to promote local artists and makers, stating, "The artisan community was what made me do this [start the business], and if I can promote them to the larger community...that's what I want to do." Both Liam and Sabine highlight the fact that the differentiation of their locally-owned stores may appear to be founded on unique product offerings, yet these product offerings actually hold very personal meanings for them. Alternately, Bradley talked about how his merchandise offerings are based both on his own personal political affiliations and customer demand:

B: When we first opened we carried a lot more books on the right, I'm a first amendment fundamentalist...you can't make those decisions at the time to carry just left or right, but we didn't sell them, so I don't carry a lot because we don't sell them. I mean, my politics are up front, but I want to be clear that we are a welcoming place for anyone, we don't judge book purchases. We are clear that if you want a book we will get it for you, we're not making that judgment but we do curate our books about the kind of bookstore we want to be, so that clearly happens, some are political, some are literary, it was informed mostly by who was coming to buy books----who our people are.

Bradley's comment demonstrates a few different things about the type of store he has created and the type of customers who shop there. Bradley's personal political beliefs are fundamental to the type of store that he operates, however, he will get any book that a customer would like, whether or not it aligns with his personal views. Yet, at the same time, according to Bradley, the customers who shop in his store tend to share similar political views.

Overall, the concept of *something different* emerged in a variety of ways via the data, including both shopper perceptions and business owner decisions. Whether distinctive products, shopping spaces, or service encounters, each demonstrates the ways that the locally-owned retailers in this study provide the differentiated experience that individuals seek when going downtown to shop.

They Know Me

The theme, *They Know Me* highlights the relational aspects that surfaced across the data. That is, participants who are shoppers and business owners indicated that there are social factors that are unique to local shopping experiences. For example, when asked about what draws them to the stores downtown, some participants offered a variety of responses tied to the social nature of the experience. Emily stated,

E: Take the vintage stores, I think they even know me...like, there's that girl trolling for...whatever I'm looking for, usually lighting or lamps, that's been my latest thing [laughs]. I mean, I think they kind of know me...not like...*know me*, *know me*, but like...they recognize me for sure.

Emily's response suggests that while she does not think that the store owners or employers know her name, there is clearly a level of recognition within the stores she visits because of the frequency with which she visits them. Emily added:

E: ...Oh and Lucid! I go in there all the time, and really, it's out of my budget, but it's like they know *Oh, here's the lady who looks around and then buys a candle* [laughs], my husband likes these one candles they have...they've even asked how I liked one of the scents I'd bought before, I don't know how they remember what I've bought.

According to Emily, even though she is not making major purchases from some of the stores she visits, frequenting them seems to be enough to establish relationships with the employees and/or owners.

The notion that the employees working in the locally-owned businesses downtown are friendly and welcoming is another point that was brought up by several participants. Kathleen indicated, "The shop keepers are much nicer." Brian echoed her sentiments, stating, the "Staff is friendlier" and Craig also noted that the people working in the stores were "Friendly...it's personable customer service, you get to have a personal connection with the store-owner." Likewise, Janet indicated that she knows the owner of the bookstore downtown and that this makes the experience of shopping there more enjoyable:

J: I really like knowing the owner of The Blue Chair...his son used to work with me...so that's pretty cool to me, knowing someone, or the family member of someone who owns these businesses...you get to know a lot of them....They're not owned by people you have no connection to...someone in another state or something like that, I like that connection, the *knowing* who these people are.

Janet's relationship with the owner and the owner's son helps to reinforce her connection to this local business and makes the experience more personal for her.

Along with the personal connections, Michelle commented on both the friendliness of the shopkeepers and the level of creativity they express: "The creativity of the shopkeepers as far as displays or wanting to please is better in these stores and the genuine interest in their customers, that appeals to me." Michelle continued to talk about how she feels about shopping at locally-owned businesses compared to chain retailers:

M: You know, I am sure the workers at Walmart or wherever, I am sure they are lovely people, but you don't really establish a relationship with a place that is that big.... You just don't do it. It feels like, get them in, get them out, it's about speed, it's not about quality of service or relationships, and what you get in a local business is quality of service, quality of product, personal connections, and I just don't think you get that in the big box stores and the shopping malls or whatever... I mean there are 200 people working in Walmart, you *can't* know them.

Michelle noted that her relationships with local downtown store owners have weakened over the years, as her health has deteriorated, and she is not able to visit downtown as much, noting "At one time I think I definitely had relationships and good recognition with several places here." One participant, Ethan, even talked about how the product and/or the experience is more genuine because of the relationship. He explained, "If they're made by people I know and if I have relationships with them, it can be art." Ethan's comment expresses not only a strong connection forged by the product, but that the relationship can actually change the meaning of the product altogether.

Although participants who are shoppers talked about the personal relationships they feel they have with the local stores and the people who work in them, participants

who are store owners also perceived there to be relationships with customers, and in a variety of ways. For example, Abigail, who owns a yarn store, reminisced about one of her regular customers, Bill:

A: Most of them are female, not all of them, I do have some men who shop here...and that's delightful, that's wonderful...one of my regulars, Bill, he told me that when he travels and goes into yarn stores, he goes in with his family and he likes to wait to see how long the owner takes to figure out that it's not his wife the owner should be talking to, but him.

Abigail's story about Bill reveals that she not only remembers some of her customers, but that she recalls some of the stories they have shared with her. Abigail also talked about her customers in a more general sense, and shared her view on some of the social reasons that younger customers come to see her:

A: I do have my younger people who have questions and they can't learn from YouTube, so they want to come in and have me explain what they are doing wrong...so I show them...and they come back, now they're not always my big purchasers...

This excerpt from Abigail points to how she likes to provide a learning experience for some of her customers, rather than just products. She said, "Ahhhh, they go to JoAnn's, the people at JoAnn's, some of them know nothing. All they can do is sell you the stuff, they can't help you." Abigail sees the relationships forged and personalized experiences gained as benefits she offers to her customers.

John, the owner of the art gallery, also shared how he thinks that his shop encourages relationships:

J: For me this is all about relationships and there is no business that I can think of that it is better than an art gallery, because you are developing relationships with artists, relationships with clients, relationships with friends, and people who love to come in and just soak up the atmosphere.

John also talked about how he thinks that his business helps to determine the types of people he builds relationships with, and said, “I say I have an invisible filter on the front door, and if you are not qualified, and you're not a good person, you don't get in, there is an invisible barrier.... You won't even walk through my door.” John’s comment indicates that he thinks very highly of the people who patronize his gallery, including those who buy and those who are there to simply “soak up the atmosphere.”

Other participants who are business owners, such as Annalisa, expressed that they hope they are forging relationships with customers. For instance, Annalisa’s store had only been open for two weeks when the following occurred:

A: This customer came in the other evening, it was her third visit in two weeks and she said her sister's boyfriend just broke up with her and she wanted to get her a little pick me up...the fact that she thought of my store as a place where she could find something for her sister shows me, that's what I wanted to achieve. I'm hoping to become that place, to have these relationships with my customers.

In just the short time that Annalisa has been in business, she is already creating connections with customers, hearing their stories, and building relationships that she hopes will grow and come to be a regular part of her business. The notion of building relationships with customers is also an aspect of the business that Katherine is dedicated to. She explained,

K: I'm committed to....I see every interaction I have as an opportunity to spread encouragement, to spread light in people, to have that moment, that thirty seconds to a minute or two minute interaction at the bar...you have those over and over and soon you have a relationship with people, you have this connection.

For Katherine, commitment to connecting with customers and developing relationships is actually a part of doing business.

Overall, whether it was described as simply a level of familiarity that customers have with store owners and employees, or specific features about the service and shopping experience, the personal connection experienced when shopping locally was something the data revealed to be important to many of the participants. This connection is viewed as a benefit by participants who shopped locally and is something considered unique to the people involved. Similarly, participants who are store owners also described different ways in which the relationships and personal connections that they establish with customers are an important part of the business and may ultimately help to foster loyalty, not just to the store, but to the entire downtown area. In the next section, both the planned and unplanned outcomes resulting from local ownership are examined.

Shopping Local: The Outcomes

Whether owning a store in the revitalized downtown or shopping at one, the data revealed that local ownership impacts the experience in a variety of ways and through a variety of outcomes. In this section, I provide an exploration of local ownership via two sub-themes that emerged within the data: (1) *Intended Outcomes* and (2) *Unintended Outcomes*.

Intended Outcomes

The ways by which local ownership can intentionally impact the results of a shopping experience are discussed in this section. One key issue that surfaced within the data is the extent to which many participants shop locally out of personal convictions about consumption. A second issue that surfaced, especially among store owners, has to do with how they endeavor to establish loyalty among their customers. Finally, the fact that participants use local shopping to contribute to the community is a key issue. Thus, these three issues are explored in the following sub-themes: (a) *Mindfulness*, (b) *Customer Loyalty*, and (c) *Helping the Community*.

Mindfulness

Some individuals have altered their purchasing habits due to beliefs about consumption. As discussed in Chapter II, one such group, *voluntary simplifiers*, believes in consuming less in order to lead more balanced lives (Etzioni, 1998). Voluntary simplifiers are often positioned on a continuum of behaviors, and can include those who have simply cut back, those who have drastically changed their behaviors, and those who have not only changed their behaviors but hold very strong views on the matter. Interpretation of the data collected for this dissertation reveals an assortment of behaviors and opinions regarding consumption habits, and the extent to which these habits are significant within participants' lives.

During the interviews, discussion often turned to how participants feel about shopping in general, about local shopping specifically, and whether or not they ever intentionally limit their consumption. When Stephanie was asked whether she limits her

consumption, she shared the following account, “Yes actually, recently my husband and I downsized from a larger house to a smaller one. We have been carting ‘stuff’ in boxes for years and we are choosing to live with less stuff.” I then asked if she has attempted to simplify her life in any way, and she replied “I recently started a new job which has taken away from life being *simple*, but the reason is because I am working to structure a better home/work balance as I make the job my own.” I asked whether she thinks that this impacts her consumption behaviors and she responded, “It absolutely does, now I only buy something if I really need it or if I *really, really* want it. If it’s not a *hell yes*, it’s a NO.” Stephanie indicated she does shop locally, but that the changes she had made recently in her life are impacting not just *where* she shops but *how often* she shops.

Others revealed stories that indicate a great deal of thought goes into their consumption habits. For example, Whitney shared many of the ways that she has altered her consumption in an effort to consume less. Whitney explained, “I think sometimes I’m better about it than others, but I’ve made a lot of mindful decisions in my life to cut back.” Whitney’s experience suggests both specific and general ways that she has done this:

W: At one point it hit me that my family...we were caught up in that whole cycle of keeping up with the Jones as they say, nice cars, a beautiful house, really nice things....We downsized, traded in our cars for less expensive ones that were still good quality, but it seemed excessive...what we were driving before, and it's just a car, taking me from point A to point B so who cares, why are we wasting so much money on cars.... We’re just trying not to be excessive. We don't deprive ourselves of things but if we buy things we try to make a point to buy things we need, things that will last or be used a great deal.

I: Wow, that’s pretty big, I mean those are not insignificant changes. Would you say there are other, like daily things you do differently too?

W: Ummmm, other things....I guess I look at packaging of products when I buy... sometimes I buy in bulk, like with snack stuff for the kids because it alleviates buying 24 little packages of something, it's just one box...and we have reusable containers we use for packaging all of their lunches. In the end I'm throwing away only one bag instead of 24 bags, so yeah, it's more of a hassle than throwing pre-packed snacks in their lunchboxes, but I guess, I think about things like that...the packaging, oh, and if I use Ziplock bags for something I try to wash them out and reuse them...send less to the landfill if possible.

Whitney's responses highlight the thought given to her overall consumption habits. A desire to be more mindful is one of the reasons she has started thinking more about where she shops. Whitney suggested that shopping locally actually makes purchase decisions easier for her, because, as she indicates, "There are maybe fewer choices, but that really helps me...I don't buy what I don't need."

Participants like Whitney cite an interest in mindfulness and avoiding excess as reasons for consuming less. Michelle explained that her consumption is relatively well-planned, but that she also considers that her consumption is not always about *things*, but that sometimes it is about experiences:

M: I plan when and where I am going to shop. I know what my budget is and what I am going to spend and what I cannot, but how I spend has changed. I enjoy eating out with friends and family. I like browsing and gift-giving and I am happy to do every bit of it downtown as long as I can get there, so my spending down here is limited... I am mindful of my consumption. I am not an extravagant type of person but in the end, I think I keep up with the average person.

Michelle suggests that though she is mindful, her overall spending is probably on par with others, but may be allocated differently.

While Whitney and Michelle's responses both suggest an aspect of mindfulness related to their consumption habits, other shoppers shared that they, too, have cut back, and offered their motivations for doing so. Janet shared a story about how her consumption habits have changed over the years:

J: I think it's just been in general...spending less on everything. It's an overall trend to valuing an experience over an object. Earlier in life when I made a lot more money I had a good job, basically I remember looking for something to buy, I was like...I have all this extra money and I was like...I couldn't find anything to buy because really I'd bought everything I wanted already and it was a very empty weird feeling, it sounds really ridiculous, there was nothing fun about shopping. Now it's fun, it's fun to do it on occasion or to like go out to dinner once a month or twice a month versus every other day.

Janet's experience is less drastic than Whitney's but she pointed to similarly positive changes that she has experienced in cutting back. While cutting back her work schedule to be home with her children after school has impacted Janet financially, she feels that she has benefitted from reducing her consumption. Although Janet shops less, she now values it more.

Spending money on things of personal value is a goal shared by other participants. In discussing whether or not Rachel has ever tried to limit or cut back on her consumption, she offered an explanation that encompassed both mindful and practical explanations for doing so:

R: There is a degree that I'm overwhelmed by stuff...I grew up around people who had too much stuff so there's the control...the struggle of bigger houses and too much stuff, like your grandmother dies and the entire family has to take two months just to deal with her stuff....Yeah, that just happened...and also, I've never been a person who that like...does a ton of shopping for fun. Sometimes I like to second-hand shop, but no, yeah...I consciously try not to shop...I mean, I also

don't have a lot of money and I want to make sure that the things I spend money on are actually important to me and most of the times that's not like...*stuff*.

Rachel's account of how and why she has simplified her consumption behaviors takes into consideration her past experiences, her current financial state, as well as what she described as "conscious" attempts to avoid shopping. Similarly, Susan talked about the idea of *stuff*, both avoiding accumulating too much of it, and the lack of meaning it holds.

S: If I buy something I try to get rid of something else though...I don't want my life to be ruled by stuff...you can't take it with you. My mom died last year and I had to figure out what to do with all of her stuff, stuff that I know meant something to her but stuff I didn't want. My kids will have to deal with that someday. I just don't want to have that much stuff, that's not what life is about.

Clearly, Susan's experience has been shaped by the relatively recent death of her mother which caused her to consider the role of "stuff" in her own life.

Interestingly, one participant shared how she thinks that her conscious consumption can actually help other people. Victoria shops locally and thinks that it is a good way to help people in the community. While discussing whether or not she has ever tried to simplify, or cut back on consumption, she offered the following perspective in regards to her behavior:

V: Maybe to help others I feel sometimes I have to consume a little more to help others... I'm a nurse and I guess it's in my blood, to help people.... I try not to have too much of anything for myself. I don't really have a lot of needs, however, I like to have some extra things because when I come across people who have needs I like to have it available. So like if I go into a local store and there's a sale on socks, heaven knows I don't need another pair of socks, but if it's in my budget I may buy a few extra because it's going to help the store and I'm going to come across someone who needs some socks...or maybe I even go out looking

for someone who needs some socks, so maybe I'm doing one for another or another for one, but then I'm having these available socks and I can give them out.... I don't like clutter and junk and excess in my own space but I like to have additional things because you come across people who have needs.

Victoria's explanation for why she thinks it is important to engage in conscious consumption behaviors considers the needs of local business owners as well as the needs of other people in the community, rather than just her own personal needs.

While Victoria's shopping motives appear to be very altruistic, other participants were not shy about offering contrasting views. When Alex was asked if he has ever cut back on his consumption, he said "No, I like to buy stuff. I guess I like new things, or changing things...refreshing things," after a brief pause he added "It's addictive."

Similarly, when James was asked the same question, he responded, "Yes, and no...I do love Walmart and I love Costco but I have to be mindful that I don't go in for one thing and come out with nineteen other things, so...I don't know." Interestingly, even Whitney, who described the drastic changes she has made in her consumption habits admitted an affection for Costco, stating, "We still go to Costco. It's totally not local, but it is a place where I can buy in bulk, so...it's not all bad." It is evident that even though Whitney has rearranged much of her life and holds strong opinions about avoiding excess in her consumption habits, where she actually shops includes a wide range of stores beyond just locally-owned downtown stores.

Overall the data suggest different degrees of mindfulness in consumption among participants. That is, the importance of mindfulness and how it plays out in terms of consumption behaviors varies greatly from one participant to the next. Alongside the

importance of mindfulness in the decision to shop local, the notion of customer loyalty that can develop from it was also brought up by several participants, and is discussed as an intended outcome in the next section.

Customer Loyalty

Based on the reasons participants have for local shopping discussed previously, such as access to unique and different products, higher levels of service quality, and the relationships that develop between business owners and customers via the experience, it is clear that an important outcome of shopping locally is customer loyalty. For instance, Sabine shared that the loyalty of her core customers is what she survives on. She explained, “The sales we get are from people who have made a point to come to our store, not just anyone walking by, the ones who purchase they come specifically for our store to buy something, it’s not just foot traffic.” Sabine said that she has been intentional in connecting with her customers, and as a result, “They feel like they are coming into a friend's house....We’ve gotten to know them, we learn about our customers.” I asked Sabine if she could give me a profile of her typical customer. She quickly replied with,

S: Definitely, they're younger, 30-55 probably. Women, we only have a few gender-neutral things here, but usually it’s women. Women who enjoy the arts and women who are culturally aware, locally-minded, they attend the theater, they read, they’re educated and.... Obviously the things we carry here are not things you need, so they have some disposable income....They like to travel and go and see new things, they like art...

Sabine's detailed knowledge of her core customers reflects the time she has spent getting to know who they are and learning about them. As such, she makes an effort to tailor her merchandise offerings to suit this core clientele.

Similarly, Abigail offered some detailed facts about her customers. When I asked who her regular customers are, she responded "My age range is wide...it goes from the mid-twenties up into the seventies, most of them are white, most of them...and, about one third of them are Jewish...most of them are over-worked too." Abigail's unique knowledge of her customers is a result of their repeated visits to her store, during which time she learns more about them. Abigail is also intentional about hosting a weekly knitting and crocheting event, to which she attributes some of her most loyal customers:

A: I have people who often stop in every Friday night and hang out and don't buy, but in the end, maybe they tell their friends *I spent the evening at Garnet City Yarns because I had a really stressful day and it just helped me calm down and we all just sat and had snacks and chocolate and we talked and it's all better....* So then their friends get a good report about me and they remember that when they need supplies.

Abigail thinks that some of her loyal customers have resulted from the Friday night knitting events at her shop, and that the loyalty extends beyond those who attend, to those who may hear about the events later.

For other store owners, such as Margaret, the data reveal a more concentrated effort to increase customer loyalty. When asked about her customers and why she thinks they shop with her, Margaret offered the following reasoning, "They just like it, it's a fun place." She continued by describing what she does for many first-time customers who are new to the area: "When people have just moved here sometimes I'll give them a

discount, or a free North Carolina magnet or sticker...I mean, it only costs me a dollar, but I know they'll remember me and they'll come back.” Margaret sees the benefit in offering a small perk to her customers and hopes it will increase loyalty and repeat visits. Similarly, like Margaret’s bonus for new customers, Abigail made a change to her store operations specifically to increase loyalty and engaged in an effort to be more available to her customers. She explained:

A: Since I took over I extended the hours. It’s hard when you have a sole proprietorship to really accommodate everyone's needs, but you've got people who work days and can only shop at night and people who are only off on weekends and others who are only off middle of the week. So there is no way to be accessible to everyone but I wanted to extend our hours to kind of make sure everyone could come in mostly when they needed to. So I went from the old hours of noon to five, to a schedule of ten to seven... it puts me here a little long during the week but in the end I think a lot of people find it easier....*Hey I don't have to wait for a day off or take a personal day to make it down to the shop.*

By offering longer store hours and making her store more accessible to her various customers, Abigail ensures that it is easier for them to visit her, instead of choosing big box stores or online options for their yarn needs.

Interestingly, while Sabine indicated she has very loyal customers, she also shared a disappointing experience and how she has actually eliminated something she used to offer customers because she felt like it was unappreciated.

S: Up until 18 months ago we did every single “First Friday”....We had wine, small snacks....We'd have an artist come in and make special pieces and do demonstrations...and because we'd been doing them for so long we knew what they used to be like---they were very profitable for our artists because they were there and could talk about their work and then attendance really started going down, people quit coming. So for me, I felt bad asking artisans to come because I felt like they weren't going to be profitable, they were selling one or two pieces

and it used to be slammed in here. It was embarrassing so I quit having artisans in. Really, I quit doing anything for it...we're still open on First Fridays, but that's it. Some of my long-time customers asked what happened to them and I told 'em, no one was coming....I guess people got too comfortable with it, or expected it, maybe it wasn't unique enough anymore, I don't know....I quit doing it.

First Fridays are monthly events held on the first Friday of each month and are designed to bring people to the downtown area. Downtown stores and businesses come together to stay open later than their normal business hours and offer free cultural and arts experiences for the community. Sabine's frustration with what was once a successful endeavor for her store reveals that she is not only concerned about customer loyalty, but also about the loyalty of her vendors. Sabine wanted the events to be profitable for everyone involved, and because that was no longer the case, she abandoned the effort.

In the same vein, brewery owner Greg shared a frustration he has experienced with regard to his different customer bases. He explained, "Our regulars constitute maybe 25-30% of our business, and that hasn't changed, it's the other two thirds of the business that are occasional visitors...they just don't stay as long." Greg thinks that the customers who are not regulars do not appreciate the local brewery in the same manner that the loyal customers do, and that there are financial consequences for the business that accompany a lack of customer loyalty.

As business owners, participants have implemented a variety of different techniques and effects to encourage customer loyalty. Such efforts result in a core group of customers, and, one that differs from those of chain retailers. The local business owners in this study tailor product and service offerings to suit the needs and wants of

their regular customers. Clearly, loyal customers, and the financial benefits they offer, are essential to helping these locally-owned downtown businesses succeed. As discussed in the next section, this success is beneficial to more than just the store owners.

Helping the Community

Along with efforts to establish a core group of loyal customers, participants who own businesses share a noticeable desire to contribute to the community through their actions. The same can be said for participants who are shoppers. The different ways that participants, whether business owners or shoppers, seek to help people in the community, or to directly help the community through their efforts, are discussed in this section.

Some participants shared that shopping locally permits them to help the people who own the businesses. For example, Jasmine explained that with shopping locally, “I am contributing to local people.” Similarly, Janice talked about the community connection she feels when she shops at locally-owned businesses, stating, “I’m helping people whose kids may be friends with my own children.” For Janice, whether she knows the business owner or not, she feels that, in the long run, there is the potential that the connection is very personal. Kathleen is another participant who talked about the sort of “ripple effect” of shopping locally. Her understanding of the impact of local shopping is that “It’s probably helping not only the owners, but those who live here too, like some of the employees or maybe even suppliers who are local.” Janice echoed the idea of helping the people involved with local businesses, saying that, with respect to shopping locally, “I’m helping people in my community find jobs.” Similarly, Juliette thinks that shopping locally is one way to reward the business owners who have put the effort into

starting a business, commenting, “These people have worked hard to start a business, I can't say they all appeal to me, but I'm glad they're here, so that's why I try to buy from them when I can.”

Not only do participants see the value of supporting those who have started local businesses, as well as those who are employed by them, but they are also aware of the economic value of local business. For example, Mary said that one of the reasons she chooses to shop locally is because “Buying locally helps the local economy.” Sally shared very similar feelings when she commented that “Shopping locally supports a strong local economy.” Yvonne referred the economic boost as an investment when she stated that with shopping locally she is “Investing locally...more of my money stays locally for reinvestment locally, its supporting a stronger city and economy.” Victoria thinks that a strong economy makes the city a more compelling place for people in the community and people who are looking to move, saying, “On [the] whole I feel like supporting the local businesses really helps Claremont's economy and it keeps the economy thriving and really makes people want to come and live here and be here.” Miriam even sees local businesses as “the backbone to the economy.” Clearly, participants feel strongly that locally-owned businesses contribute to the community, which, in turn, helps to justify their decisions to support these businesses.

At the same time that participants who are shoppers think that shopping locally helps the community, some participants who are store owners also share this view. For example, Liam suggested that when a product is purchased from his store, “You are directly affecting a lot of people with your purchase...it's a chain of supply, in a very real

way. The brand might have just 5-25 employees and they are getting their supplies from other local small businesses who are in the same boat.” In Liam’s mind, shopping at his boutique provides benefits beyond just his own personal gain as the proprietor.

Although participants seem to view shopping local as “helping” overall, more personal and singular demonstrations of support in the community surfaced as well. For instance, Margaret shared a story about how she has developed a friendship with a customer, and how they have actually helped each other.

M: One of my regulars, Michael, he's a musician. I know he doesn't make a lot of money. He's always buying microphones or anything musical. Anyway, he came in and saw these drafting tables and he really wanted them, he saw them on my Instagram accountHe saw it and came in and the tables had already sold when he got into the store, I asked him---*if I see any more drafting tables would you be interested*. So that very next week I saw a couple, they're back there [points to the back of the store] so I called him up and said, if you will go with me to get them--you see, being single now it's hard for me to go pick up stuff sometimes, I have a big truck, but, I was like, if you'll go with me you can have one at cost, and he was all excited, so we went and bought a bunch of stuff together. He hasn't decided which one he wants yet, he had a gig up in New York City, so he's gone right now, but he couldn't decide so I told him we'd bring both back to the store and when he gets back he can come decide. So, he's nice, he's become a friend...you want to help out someone like that.

Margaret’s story about her customer Michael reveals yet another way that the desire to help others is an intentional outcome of local shopping.

As described in this section, outcomes related to shopping at the locally-owned stores in the downtown area focus on ways that participants consciously desire to be more mindful about their own consumption behaviors, and how participants who own businesses deliberately seek to create customer loyalty through their actions. Likewise, participants, including shoppers and business owners, demonstrate intentional efforts to

contribute to their community and to the people within it through their local shopping behaviors. Although many intentional efforts were observed among those participating in this study, there are also unintentional ways that participants who shop locally, and those who own local businesses, contribute to the community overall through their actions. The unintended outcomes resulting from these efforts are discussed in the following section.

Unintended Outcomes

In addition to the intended outcomes of shopping locally, several unexpected or unintended outcomes also emerged. Again, the notion of helping others and building relationships emerged, yet through chance happenings rather than planned efforts. One example of this idea is that of the relationships that have developed between businesses in the downtown area. To explore the various unintended outcomes of shopping local, two sub-themes are discussed in this section: (a) *Building Relationships*, and (b) *Establishing Camaraderie*.

Building Relationships

Alongside the interactions that are specifically designed to encourage customer loyalty, there appear to be times when participants as business owners form more social relationships with customers. Indeed, the data collected with business owners reveal a wide range of customer relationships, from basic recognition to very familiar and warm connections. For some participants who are shoppers, the more they visit retail stores or businesses in the downtown, or the more they have become acquainted with people in the downtown, the more likely they seem to be interested in trying new places or curious

about other places in the downtown area. For example, Victoria talked about the way that her experiences with shopping locally and, in turn, meeting people and becoming familiar with others in the community has piqued her interest in other businesses in the downtown. These experiences also create the potential for future loyalty. Victoria shared:

V: I am seeing owners of some of the businesses downtown out more in the community, like the one of the chefs from Red Velvet was doing a demo at the Farmer's Market...it made me say, *Ooooh, I need to eat at Red Velvet the next time I go downtown.*

Victoria actually was not aware of the restaurant until she attended this event, and now the restaurant, which is a newer one in the downtown area, is on her list of must-try places. Victoria's social interaction with the chef is one example of how connections matter.

For other participants, more familiar relationships exist. For example, James mentioned that he is drawn to the businesses downtown because of the potential relationships that are forged with the people. James articulated, "I never go to chains, I like to know the managers where I shop or the chefs at restaurants. It's like...once you form the relationship...it's like walking into your friend's house, it's a feeling of comfort and familiarity." James has moved beyond simply recognizing people at places, to considering the locally-owned businesses he visits to be familiar, even likening them to a friend's house. James added:

J: It's more direct shopping at the local stores...if the relationship is established with the local store owner I am much, much, much more likely to continue to

frequent that place. It's all based on the relationships for me. It's much easier to build relationships with a small business owner than to build a relationship with a big store, so that's a big draw for me to keep it local...

Clearly, for James the relational aspect is an important part of shopping, and locally-owned stores offer this for him. Alex has a similar point of view. When asked if he has formed relationships with any of the businesses, or people who work at the local businesses in the downtown, he replied:

A: I think so...a few of them, especially the places we go to eat or drink frequently, and there are certain antique shops or art galleries where you know things are changing on a regular basis so we'll go in and out pretty much every time we're downtown and you kind of build that...rapport.

For Alex, these relationships are developed over time and through repeated visits.

It is clear that the frequency with which participants visit places contributes to how much they feel they have built relationships with store owners. Janet, the aforementioned participant who talked about cutting back on her consumption, thinks that she would have more connections with the people and places downtown if she were to visit more often,

J: You know, to be honest maybe not as much as I would like to and that has something to do with shopping in general...I just don't go shopping as much as I used to, I don't go out to eat as much as I used to, so it's only, I guess if I were down here to shop more I would feel like I knew these people more.

Although Janet has cut back and is not shopping or eating out as much as she once did, she still thinks that the local downtown businesses are the types of places where relationships are likely to be forged.

Building relationships is not something that just the shoppers commented on. Participants who are business owners also talked about the organic ways that relationships develop with customers. For example, Cassandra talked about the point at which she realized that her presence in the store means more to people than just ringing up sales. Cassandra shared:

C: I just got back from maternity leave. I've been gone for two months and for the first two weeks people were just coming in to say hello, they just stop in to say *Hi*...they were shocked to see me and so excited to see my son, but they just stop in to say *Hi*.

Cassandra's experience demonstrates that her relationships with customers has extended beyond purely functional to become social in nature. Another indication of how personal relationships emerged in the data is provided by Cara, who noted,

C: I remember what customers purchase, I like to know customers by name...yeah, I remember what they've purchased---their favorite oils, or something like that, I get the feeling that customers appreciate that I really care, and we get feedback as well...and customers come in and I'll say *Hi Dana* and they're like—*Whoa, you remember my name*---even when I see them at the grocery store.

Cara's example of referring to customers by name, remembering their purchases, or saying hello in places outside of her store, alongside Cassandra's example of customers stopping in to say hello to her after returning from maternity leave, are indicative of the

social connections that are forged between customers and store owners/employees, often without even trying.

Yet another way that the idea of developing relationships is evident is through the conversations that business owners have with their customers. For example, not only does Abigail tend to know a lot about her customers, but she has also established a high level of comfort with her customers that is evident in the personal conversations that can often be overheard in her store. One such example of the closeness that Abigail has with her customers was evident on a particular visit I made to observe her store. The following passage from my field notes describes the conversations that were carried on between Abigail and her customers:

Stopped in to see Abigail today and as I've come to expect there were several people in her store, all women again, only one person was buying anything, another was sitting at the table knitting and three other women were just chatting...it wasn't until one of the women left that I realized they weren't all together. The situation was so familiar and friendly, it seemed as though everyone knew each other, but it turns out they each only knew Abigail. Everyone was laughing, talking about sex and people getting pregnant. The conversation turned to birth rates nine months after the Super Bowl, and the notion that if your team wins, you celebrate and come home and have celebration sex. Abigail said *there must be something in the water...nope, it's that sex is good, that's it...* everyone was laughing and sharing pretty personal experiences. The conversation stopped when the UPS man came in with a delivery of several boxes, then everyone kind of quieted down and went back to just browsing and asking Abigail about certain yarns and talking about projects that they were working on.

Abigail interacts with her customers in a way that illustrates the deep level of comfort they feel with her. Customers shop there for the fiber art supplies but also for the friendship and camaraderie they experience while in her store.

Another example of how relationships among people in the downtown have resulted from local shopping is an experience that Cassandra shared with me. When Cassandra was talking about the overall relational experience of the store, I asked about the extent to which it impacts customer relationships. She replied,

C: So maybe a month ago my husband and I were like...he met me here when I got off work, we we're like, *Lets run a quick errand and then go home and do dinner* ...well, we didn't get home until almost 9pm...and we left here at 6! So, we went to the Coffee Bean to get a coffee, we know people who work there...we saw people we knew there too, then went to Design Times and ran into people we know, I saw a few customers there and just walking from here to there, and ...you can't go downtown for a quick trip, you go downtown to like hang out and be a part of the community because you're going to run into people you know.

Because of the relationships Cassandra has developed with customers who shop locally, and because of her own local shopping habits, she has become well acquainted with employees of other businesses and people who shop at the boutique where she works. The different types of connections and relationships that participants talked about emerge out of the experiences involved in shopping local and the personal interactions it fosters.

Establishing Camaraderie

Although building relationships with customers through interactions over time is an important goal among the participants who own businesses, a related aspect that emerged from the data is the camaraderie they share with other business owners within the downtown area. During data collection, a range of levels of interaction were seen among business owners, and it is clear that a certain degree of camaraderie exists among them.

Cassandra, who manages a boutique, offered an example of the interactions she recently had with another locally-owned retailer on the block, and what a typical conversation between them might sound like:

C: Mark, down at Area, he gets off and, he shut down then he stopped in and asked how business was today...so we'll talk about business or sales, or how is traffic, or yeah Monday sucked, not a single customer.... So we support each other in ways like that, we know what it's like, and the next day we may be busy, but we have relationships, so when people come in looking for something we don't have we'll say...*Go check out this place, they may have it.*

Cassandra's example of the informal network that has developed in the downtown, and her interactions with another store owner, is not unique to her particular boutique.

Annalisa, a relatively new store owner, talked about how the decision to locate downtown was based on relationships and a sense of community that she felt with the other downtown retailers. As she explained, these relationships help her feel supported in her efforts:

A: I definitely connect with them, that was a big part of knowing specifically I wanted to open in Claremont and in downtown. Having worked in retail for so long, so many of them, Kylie at Design Times, Sabine at All Good Things, Ginny at Lucid...I already knew a lot of people who were down here and spent some time talking with them, they were incredibly helpful.... I've felt incredibly supported, and because on the south end we're all in the same boat of trying to get people down there, there's a lot of camaraderie.

Annalisa's comment about being "all in the same boat" is a sentiment echoed by other business owners that participated in this study. For example, Bradley commented, "There's a real sense of we're all in it together, not Pollyanna-ishly, but obviously I want

The Coffee Bean to succeed because it brings people downtown. I want all of these places to do well.” Similarly, Katharine said as much about her experiences with other businesses in the downtown, stating:

K: I don't feel like there's any contention, it's really friendly. It's a mutual respect of having a common vision of wanting to create the awesome place that we all know Claremont can be, and we all want to do what we can. I think we share that vision and keep that more in focus. I don't hear a lot of scuttlebutt or drama or nonsense, or I'm deaf ears to that, so I guess I don't know of anything negative.

While Katherine indicated that relationships between the businesses are very positive, a few examples also emerged indicating that some in the downtown are less interested in interacting with other businesses, or are less-than-positive about revitalization of the area. Greg, for example, shared an example of a recent situation where the business owners on his block were attempting to come together and hold a special event, but then experienced pushback from one business owner on the block. Apparently, this business owner had been downtown the longest of all and responded that “I have my client base and I don't care, and furthermore, if you want to have an event to bring people into the neighborhood you better not impede my parking that day.” Greg added, “the ones who are most against it [revitalization efforts], most of them are gone now, or closing up, selling shops, whatever...” In Greg’s experience, the majority of the businesses in the downtown area that he has interactions with are very positive towards neighboring store owners, as well as about the revitalization efforts and joining together for neighborhood events.

Interestingly, Greg's perspective that those business owners who are the least positive about the changes in the downtown are also the longest-standing businesses is shared by another participant, Annalisa. She said, "There's only a few who haven't been supportive, and they're actually the ones who've been here the longest who I think are just so...set in their ways." The "few" who have not been supportive are actually two stores that the participants mentioned by name.

While most of the participants who are business owners talked about a sense of camaraderie, the ways that they demonstrate their support for neighboring businesses vary. As Annalisa shared in the abovementioned excerpt, she spent time talking with some of the other business owners in the downtown prior to opening her store. She further specified that "I picked Sabine's brain to death. She's a cornerstone, literally a cornerstone of the downtown, so I knew she would be a good resource..." Moreover, Annalisa approached another store owner who would be situated almost directly across the street from her, and described the positive feedback she received from him, stating,

A: I sat down with another business owner, Liam, and asked him what it was like being a business owner down here and he told me that I'm getting in at the right time...he said *I've watched my business grow a little bit each year*...he gave me *numbers*, and he gave me the confidence to know that things are moving in the right direction here.

Annalisa's experiences demonstrate that not only are neighboring businesses supportive of the idea of other retailers coming into the area, but they are even willing to provide information in an attempt to help other retailers succeed.

Although business advice is one way that locally-owned retailers support each other, other types of neighborly relationships also emerged through the data. When Margaret was describing how she interacts with other businesses, she offered, “Informally, I check in on people. I check in on Mike [another local business owner], he’ll like help me unload stuff...he lets me park on his ramp.” Margaret’s example reveals another tangible way that business owners help each other and collaborate. Moreover, when talking with Cassandra about some of the ways that her store works with other businesses in the downtown, she pointed to the cash wrap desk in the store and said “There are new businesses that just opened. Here, this is her store [handing me a postcard for Annalisa’s store]. We have cards for The Table too...see, all of these brochures [points to the brochures and cards]” (see Figure 10). The fact that Cassandra’s store helps to promote other downtown businesses is the clearest example of support shown by locally-owned retailers for one another.

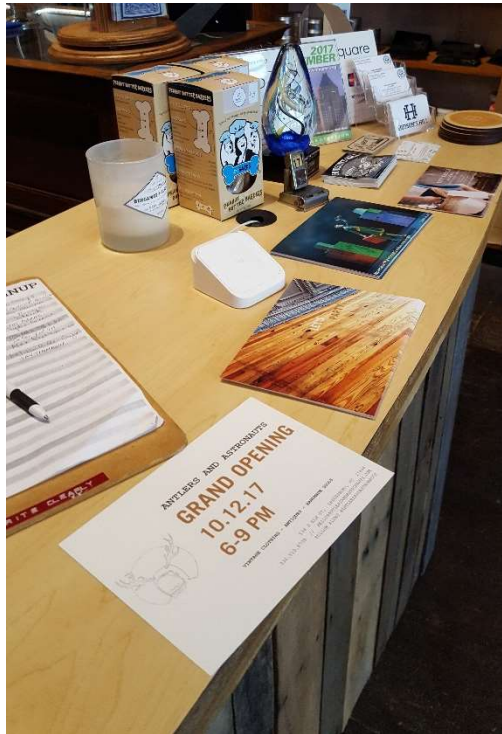


Figure 10. Brochures and Cards for Other Local Businesses (photo by author)

A final example of the camaraderie and focus on building community that emerged during data collection actually happened during the interviews. Many offered to connect me with other business owners to include in the study. The excerpt below is a passage from my field notes describing as much,

I can't believe how helpful everyone has been. Everybody I meet with and everyone I talk to keeps telling me *Oh, you've got to meet this person* or *Oh, have you been here or there* or *Have you talked to so and so yet?* They all seem to know each other and they're all trying to put me in touch with other people...all seem to have such good things to say about each other.

Admittedly, the ease by which I was able to connect with each of the business owners, and the fact that they freely shared their experiences with me, was somewhat of a

surprise. However, such aspects of the data collection process clearly reveal the degree of solidarity that exists amongst local business owners within the downtown area.

Although I did not specifically ask participants who are shoppers if they are aware of this camaraderie, one of them mentioned as much when she was talking about one of the reasons she likes to shop locally, stating, “I like so many of the businesses downtown and love how they also support and advertise for each other. A rising tide raises all ships” (Stephanie). Thus, not only do most of the businesses act in support of each other, at least one participant has actually observed this phenomenon during her experiences with shopping locally. Indeed, it is notable that the notion of competition, or a sense of rivalry, were things that I did not experience or observe during my research.

As described in this chapter, people are a critical link in the chain of meanings encompassed by the experiences of shopping local. Both shoppers and owners/employees experience costs and benefits attributable to shopping locally in the downtown area, including drawbacks such as higher costs, to advantages that include building relationships. Outcomes of local shopping and local store ownership impact people and the downtown area in intended and unintended ways. In the next chapter, the practices that people engage in with respect to local shopping and how they are fundamental to the meaning of local shopping are discussed.

Summary

In this chapter, the second of three conceptual areas used to structure the interpretation of the data was presented. Three themes, *Local Shopping: What are the Costs? What’s so Great About Local Shopping?* and *Shopping Local: The Outcomes*

highlight the key ways that people are fundamental to understanding the experience of local shopping. In the next chapter, the third conceptual area, Practices, is examined.

CHAPTER VI

**THEMATIC INTERPRETATION PART III:
UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PRACTICES**

As discussed in Chapter II, practice theory is a theory of how social beings, each with their own diverse motives and intentions, can create change, such as positively impacting and transforming their communities (Ortner, 2006). As discussed, everyday actions and routine habits, such as local shopping (Zelizer, 2005) or local business ownership, can be thought of as practices when they are routinely carried out. Likewise, as also explored in Chapter II, the literature posits that civic engagement, locally-owned businesses, and responsible capitalism are all practices that can assist in creating similar kinds of change. When combined, the concept of civic engagement, or actions that benefit the community (Adler & Goggin, 2005), locally-owned businesses, which are typically run by owners who are committed to the community (Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson & Nucci, 2002), and responsible capitalism, which suggests that businesses are an integral part of the community in which they exist (Keys, Malnight & Stoklund, 2013), can result in positive change for the local community. In the case of this dissertation, the “local community” is the revitalized downtown area. In this chapter, the data are interpreted for how practices, such as local shopping and local business ownership, can positively impact a revitalized downtown and the people within it. Both practices are highlighted for the deeper meanings that are embedded in them, and particularly when examined in the context of downtown revitalization.

Participants, as shoppers, local business owners, or representatives of downtown community organizations, are all integral to shaping the revitalized downtown through their practices. It is clear that participants are doing something more meaningful than what might be simply seen as routine actions, especially those related to shopping. To explore the meanings of their practices more deeply, this chapter is divided into three sections based on the emergent themes: (1) *Practices as Personal*, (2) *Practices as Social*, and (3) *Partnerships as Practices*.

Practices as Personal

The data reveal that the practices of participants who shop locally and those who own local businesses appear to be in part shaped by personal beliefs. To explore the ways that participants' beliefs shape their practices, two sub-themes are discussed in this section: (a) *A Sense of Pride* and, (b) *Feelings of Empowerment*.

A Sense of Pride

According to participants, going downtown to shop is not only a means to an end (obtaining a product or service), it is considered a practice, and not just because it is a routine habit. That is, for many of the participants, local shopping is accompanied by a sense of satisfaction or personal pride. Moreover, the business owners in the downtown are described by many participants as displaying a sense of pride through business ownership. When participants were asked how they feel about the practice of local shopping, a range of responses were shared, but all suggest that it is about more than just shopping. One participant, Sadie, who shops locally, simply stated that, "[It] makes me

feel better about my purchase.” Other participants shared more detailed sentiments about the practice. For example, Whitney indicated:

W: I feel like I am making a difference when I shop locally. Sure, I mean...[it] sounds kind of crazy, but I think it has to make a difference. I wonder sometimes how my twenty dollars, or whatever I spend helps, because I don't always spend a lot of money when I'm shopping down here. Sometimes it's just a coffee...so less than twenty then of course, or lunch at a local restaurant, so in a way it seems hard to believe it could make a difference, but when it comes down to it, I think it does.

Whitney thinks local shopping helps others, however, she also questions the extent of the help she provides because her purchases are not usually that large. Whitney added:

W: I feel like maybe I'm actually helping the business owners to pay their rent or to pay their employees...like the girl making my coffee is actually taking home part of what I'm paying...like a bigger portion of what I just paid for that coffee. I guess it's more tangible than when you go to Starbucks, and I know there, ummm, the corporation is in charge of it all, even my few dollars, it just doesn't feel the same. It's palpable, you feel like you're actually doing something good...and on top of it you're getting something for yourself.

For Whitney, the practice of local shopping can make an impact in the lives of others.

The sense of pride and the belief that the practice of local shopping helps others is something Tim also mentioned:

T: Yeah, I mean places downtown all seem to be local or have a local vibe and it does feel pretty good... I don't feel good about helping Mr. Target, or paying for the salary of a major CEO, you just don't get that same feeling when you buy stuff at Target... he's probably not my neighbor, all I get out of Target is a red card [laughs].

For Tim, the practice of local shopping feels good because he considers who will ultimately benefit from his purchases, and the local connection to these individuals is something that he supports. A sense of pride in the practice of local shopping also surfaced when participants talked about the importance of keeping money within the local community. Megan, another participant who shops locally, suggested that the practice of local shopping “facilitates a sense of homeliness and community pride.” Alex also described what he feels from shopping locally when he said “there’s definitely a sense of...I don’t know what the word is, maybe a sense of satisfaction, or, ummm, maybe just feeling good about it.”

Participants who shop locally could not always articulate what they feel about it, but seem to experience positive feelings about engaging in the practice in general. Whitney’s example highlights the value of shopping locally, revealing, “I’d almost say I value the item I buy more when it comes from a local store. I’m not quite sure what it is...it’s a warm fuzzy feeling [laughing].” Whitney indicates that she values the product more when purchased at a local store. Courtney, another shopper, expressed that the practice of local shopping fulfills her. She stated, “there’s somewhat of an internal reward for me.... I can support my local economy when I shop here.” Victoria, another participant who shops locally, had this to say about it,

V: I feel like I make a difference when I shop here...like one little pea or you know rock that you throw in has a rippling effect and it ends up affecting the whole body of water. So yeah I think even though it's just me, I still make a difference when I do and of course I'm going to talk to other people about my experiences about the service or the deals so then my friends are going to go...so then there's more of that rippling effect. So yeah I definitely feel like I make a difference, more than just me.

Victoria's sentiments suggest that even though she is a small part of the experience, she thinks that her practices make a difference exponentially because she shares her experiences with others.

Although many of the participants who shop locally indicate that a sense of satisfaction or pride accompanies the practice, other participants think that it is the practices of the local business owners that prompt their feelings of pride. Michelle shared, "When it's a locally-owned mom-and-pop store of whatever kind it is....I think the people take more care with what they offer and they take more pride in what they offer and I like that." Michelle added that not only is it a sense of pride, but "It's more personable, its more creative.... I think it supports the community more" adding that these are all reasons why she is committed to the practice of shopping locally. Lisa shared similar feelings related to why she enjoys shopping locally, saying, "Maybe it's just because they [the owners] take pride in their store or restaurant." Similarly, Stephanie indicated that in relation to the practice of shopping locally, she also believes there is a sense of pride in the ownership and product offerings, stating "You get to know the people who work there, and they seem to know about the products that they sell. Most local shops sell local products and take pride in that." In as much as shoppers talked about a sense of pride resulting from their support of locally-owned businesses, they also recognize a degree of pride stemming from the ownership of locally-owned businesses.

Even though many participants are proud of their practices with respect to shopping at local stores in the downtown area, one participant indicated that she shops locally for more "selfish" reasons. Rachel explained,

R: I like that my money stays here so that makes me feel good, but I don't see it as a moral action because the experience is better....So it's mostly selfish reasons, it's more pleasant to be in a place that is unique, not a moral action.

Rachel's perspective is unique, in that because she benefits from the practice of shopping locally, she does not consider it to be as altruistic as some, even though she acknowledges that her practices support the community.

Although Rachel's comment indicates that she does not see shopping locally as a moral action, other participants see a parallel between their local shopping experiences and other activities that they do in support of the community. That is, several shared a number of ways they take pride in supporting the community through other practices they engage in, such as volunteering. For example, Emily stated, "I volunteer some...and ummm, give to a few different charities, so....I guess, I guess sometimes I feel like I should do more, but..." Similarly, when Whitney was asked about whether she supports the community in ways other than shopping, she responded with the following story:

W: I volunteer at my kids' schools, and we give through our church too, they do, uh...not just foreign missions but we do a lot of local outreach, so I participate in several ways with that...like events and programs for the homeless...I just took a big bag of clothes to this woman I met....We were serving breakfast and I got to talking to her, my kids have way more than they need, and this woman...I don't exactly know her story, or why she's starting out with next to nothing, but she was trying to get back on her feet and she has kids who are about the same ages as mine...wear the same sizes, and you know how hard that is, being a kid who looks...who everyone can tell doesn't have money and is wearing the same two or three outfits all the time....So I took her a ton of stuff, we don't need it and she was so grateful....I'm going to do more, I know I have friends who can do it too, I just need to ask.

Whitney's personal experience demonstrates that supporting the community through her practices is important to her. She is not only proud of how she can help, but it has become very personal for her as well.

While some participants shared personal stories similar to Whitney's, others indicated a sense of pride in how their consumption practices are "giving back."

Stephanie explained:

S: I try go to restaurants that support local charities on certain nights. Something about it just feels better, and really even if they aren't having a charity night, I want to support them because I know they've been so willing to give back.

Although Stephanie did not discuss the other practices she participates in that benefit the community, she does deliberately patronize businesses that support the community.

Michelle is another participant who talked about the ways that other practices, such as volunteering, are important to her and fill her with a sense of pride, even though she struggles with her own mobility. When Michelle was asked whether or not she supports the community through practices beyond local shopping, she said "Absolutely, I am, I try to be....I volunteer at the Jewish Family Services food pantry every Thursday morning distributing food, and there's other things that I do, but I am limited due to my accessibility..."

For many of the shoppers participating in this study, a strong sense of pride emerged when they talked about the different practices they engage in to support the community. This pride is particularly evident in the way they talked about shopping downtown and the impact it has, especially when aligned with the other practices that

benefit the community. In sum, the practice of shopping at locally-owned downtown stores is one way that participants demonstrate a sense of personal pride resulting from their practices. Moreover, these participants also noticed a similar sense of pride among store owners. Through participants' local shopping behaviors and/or business ownership, their practices support the idea of creating change by positively impacting the community and the revitalization of the downtown area. The next section includes discussion of how local shopping practices positively impact the community through the empowerment they offer both shoppers and store owners.

Feelings of Empowerment

Although the practice of local shopping is framed as a moral act and one that garners a sense of pride among participants, shopping locally also prompts feelings of empowerment among them. For some participants, it is about the control they have over where their money is going and the changes they can make because of it. For instance, Janice said, "If I need a book I'd rather give The Blue Chair my money...even if they have to order the book and it means waiting a few days." In a similar vein, Valerie shared how it is important for her, "Not to give in to the hype of big-box retailers." Shopping locally affords her this control. Yvonne is another shopper participating in this study who thinks that she can make changes in her community through local shopping because she is voting with her dollars. She explained,

Y: I don't spend money I've worked hard to earn to support people or operations with whom or which I disagree...whether for what they choose to do with their income, like big game hunting, like Jimmie John's, or for how they impact local businesses or their employees, like how Walmart does.

For Yvonne, the practice of local shopping helps her feel empowered because she is making a deliberate choice about where to spend her money. Rachel is another shopper participating in the study who shared her reasons for shopping at locally-owned rather than chain stores, and that she thinks that this practice can result in changing the lives of others:

R: I have some political feelings about, ummm, not investing in corporations or like, you know materials that are getting shipped in from other places that have like...like I feel like a lot of the things you can go buy from places like Target are like crappy, depressing imitations of things that you could buy from someone like here, could actually make, or you know...someone locally would benefit from.

Rachel's determination to shop locally is not just prompted by the impression that chain stores carry inferior goods, but that the economic support of the practice can be directed at benefitting a local individual.

One of the store owners participating in this study, Sabine, also talked about how she feels empowered to support local artisans through the products she carries in her store. Sabine thinks that the practice of owning a local business allows her to create change in the form of financial support that benefits people in the community through "selling products that directly affect maker's livelihoods." She revealed that she thinks the connection to the people behind the products is the reason why many of her customers shop with her. Sabine also mentioned that the majority of the items in her store are gift items, and said that "They buy them because there is a story behind them and they want to give that. It's a two-fold gift, an awesome item with a really cool story to it." From Sabine's perspective, she has the power to provide an income to local

artisans and her customers expand the reach of this “good” when giving these items as gifts.

Participants—shoppers and store owners alike—indicate that the support of local people is what empowers and motivates them to participate in practices like shopping locally and owning local businesses. For instance, James, who shops locally, talked about how he feels about supporting local producers, saying:

J: There's a guy who, in Bennington...who makes shirts out of organic, sustainable, cotton, and they're one of a kind, and picking up traction. So how cool is that to say it's North Carolina organic cotton and it's from your local farmers...like craft beers, they do it too...get stuff from local farmers....I'd rather support companies who are supporting other local people.

For James, the notion that he is supporting local farmers and producers through his purchases is something that he feels privileged to do, because, in doing so, he is making a difference in the lives of people in his community.

Although many of the shoppers in this study feel a sense of empowerment knowing that they are supporting local businesses through their local shopping practices, Liam shared an experience that he had when he first began selling products that offered more local benefits.

L: It was a few racks, mostly clothes, t-shirts and the most interesting things we could find but...they couldn't wrap their minds around a plain t-shirt for \$15-20 even though it was made in the U.S. and made consciously, instead of in some factory in Bangladesh...it was crazy!

Liam strives to empower his customers through the practice of owning and operating his store and because of the specific products he sells. He explained:

L: The parameters are Made in the USA. We try to find items that are as much as possible, made in the United States, obviously parts or materials may be made elsewhere, but the concept is pretty easy to stand by. Consciously made...the idea of finding a company that has values to not be exploiting their employees or the resources they have and use, more or less have some guidelines that are...better than standard legal guidelines, higher standards....That makes it hard though, because you're taking the word of the manufacturer, or maker, that they are really doing those things. You have to trust them.

Liam's statement about the types of products he carries in his store demonstrates how these parameters can help to empower those shoppers who want to buy consciously made goods, but that sometimes a disconnect exists. Abigail also sees the practice of local ownership as a way to prompt feelings of empowerment among her customers. She shared:

A: People feel like they get a say on my stock, that they get to help me decide what I bring into the store, and that's a very empowering feeling for them. They give me feedback and they know I listen. They tell me about companies they love, and then I may get roped in and say *Hey I think you're onto something*, and really, that helps the yarn producers and the local dyers and all the smaller companies that go into producing something and getting their exposure out to the wider community. Customers feel like they're helping out, and they feel more attached to me because I'm listening to them, and I care about what they think.

Abigail's excerpt demonstrates how she can help to sustain smaller companies through her orders, and that listening to her customers empowers them to feel like they are helping her as a business owner.

The idea that locally-owned businesses offer shoppers the opportunity to be empowered by these consumption decisions is also evident through some of the products advertised online. During data collection, the image in Figure 11 (below) was posted on social media. Sabine's store designed and created t-shirts for sale. A portion of the proceeds from the t-shirts was donated to a local non-profit organization that provides scholarships for children to attend art camps during school breaks and the summer months.



Figure 11. T-shirts Designed and Sold by Sabine's Store in Support of Scholarships

While Sabine's practice is a simple way that she can help the community and empower shoppers to do the same through their purchases, other participants who are business owners, like Liam, are a bit uncertain about whether or not they are truly empowering people. He opined:

L: We're not always sure what we offer the community, but it is doing something, or at least we're trying. It's hard to know sometimes, unless someone comes in and tells you explicitly...unless you're told by a customer it's difficult to know if you're making a positive impact, but I think we're putting it out there.

Although Liam expressed uncertainty regarding whether or not his customers are aware of how the products he offers can be a form of empowerment, through his practice of local store ownership, and his standards regarding product assortment, his store is endeavoring to empower its customers. Courtney, a participant who shops downtown, indicated awareness of this opportunity to make a difference through shopping practices when she stated, "I love how many [of the stores] have activism attached to their products." Courtney's downtown shopping practices are clearly a way for her to do more than just shop, as they reflect her personal values, and she sees similar values guiding the decisions of store owners.

According to participants, making the choice to shop locally or to own a local business provides a sense of pride and feelings of empowerment, which can be described as practices that benefit the greater good. For instance, supporting a local boutique may result in an individual feeling good about his or her purchase, but through this practice he or she is also supporting a local business owner. Moreover, the ripple effects of this support may extend to benefit the wider community and create long-term change not only for the business owners, but the downtown area and people within it. These ripple effects are examined in the next section, which focuses on the ways that participants seek to support the broader community through practices related to local shopping and local business ownership.

Practices as Social

Gaining a sense of pride and empowerment from shopping locally or owning businesses are not the only ways that participants in this study discussed the topic at hand. In particular, the notion of giving back to the community was evident throughout the discussions with both those who shop locally as well as those who own local businesses. The following themes shed light on the ways that participants perceive their practices to be in support of the community: (a) *Pro-Local, Pro-Community*, and (b) *Community Consciousness*.

Pro-Local, Pro-Community

Although shopping locally often contributes to a sense of personal pride or empowerment among participants, in conversations, they frequently shifted from the personal to focus on “the community,” or the social. Participants shared a variety of ways that shopping locally is often motivated by a concern for the broader community. For example, Tim, a participant who shops locally, described it this way:

T: It feels like I am supporting the community and the entrepreneurship aspects.... It seems like they [locally-owned businesses] are connected to the community, so if I am giving to their business, you feel like you are helping not just them, but the community in a way. It seems like there are a lot of these local folks, like people like Green Market, they give a lot back to the community, and I'm good with that.

Tim is clearly convinced that his practices related to local shopping positively impact the broader community. Similarly, Stephanie described local shopping as “Supporting the people who have committed to our community by having their business in our community.” A common theme throughout the data, other participants who shop locally

voiced similar feelings, such as Susan, who said “It all stays in the community, the money [that is], I hate Amazon, [and] places like that.... You know they don’t care about our community, they only care about the money.” Carol feels similarly, stating “I’m giving back to members of my community,” while another shopper, Ralph, recognizes the extent of influence that his local shopping has when stating, “More of your money stays in the community.” Supporting the local community and the people within it was often behind participants’ decisions to adopt the general practice of shopping local, and specifically within the downtown area.

Participants also think that they are creating positive changes in the community by choosing to shop local, and to do so downtown, as they discussed the impact of such practices on business owners, their families, and their employees. For example, Janice, a participant who shops locally, described it this way, “I’m helping people whose kids may be friends with my own children. I’m helping people in my community find jobs.” Another participant, Whitney, shared how she thinks local shopping helps the community, stating, “I think it impacts the individual lives of the business owners and their employees and depending on the business, maybe even the people who supply the food...the ingredients if they’re sourced locally...there are ripple effects.” Renee is another participant who shops locally and similarly described how she is motivated to support locally-owned businesses because of the direct impact it has on people in the community:

R: I'm pro-local! It's different than shopping corporate. You really get to know the people, and then it feels like you could actually be impacting their lives by making purchases. It turns into this thing...I'm helping so-and-so, not just....I'm

buying this, or going out to dinner ...but I'm actually keeping someone in business...or, at least trying.

Making a positive and significant impact in the lives of others, such as helping to keep a business running and supporting the local economy, are benefits that other participants who shop locally also mentioned. For example, Valerie talked about how “supporting local artists or local companies boosts the Claremont economy,” and added “whether it’s \$5 or \$50 it’s going directly to someone in our neighborhood.” Victoria also offered her opinion on how shopping benefits the broader community:

V: Keeping the money here in Claremont keeps the families thriving, and umm...you don't spend so much of your money outsourced to the big-box stores, and if the families are here and they're thriving, then the city as a whole will be doing well. If we have higher levels of poverty, then people aren't able to sustain themselves because business isn't good, and then we run into other socioeconomic problems.

Similarly, Michelle shared how she thinks that she is positively impacting the community through the practice of shopping downtown, and specifically at the locally-owned bookstore:

M: Local independent bookstores are going the way of the Dodo bird. I think we need to do everything we can to hold on to places like that... It is amazing the things they do, the speakers and writers they bring in. That is what a bookstore should do. That is what a community-based bookstore should be, and it's wonderful. I don't want to see anything happen, and I know my expenditure of ten dollars is not going to make or break their business, but I want my expenditure to be there for them, because I want them to stay around... I want to make sure of it.

Several participants who shop downtown also indicated an understanding of the ways that some of the locally-owned businesses contribute to the community through events or by giving to local charities. Whitney mentioned that she has always been a customer at one of the downtown breweries and observed the ways the owners participate in community events, saying, “They’re always hosting events and getting involved in whatever is happening, I like that... I feel like...my money is going to a business that is involved in community causes...and we get to drink beer. It’s a pretty good deal [laughing].” Similarly, Mary indicated that, “Local businesses build community,” and that is one of the reasons that the practice of local shopping is important to her. Mary continued:

M: Tanner’s, they do that...*Good Works Wednesdays* I think it’s called, and I mean it’s like every Wednesday where they give 10% of the profits to a certain charity or cause...and it’s all local organizations...we like going there anyway, and that we indirectly support the community by going, so...that’s kind of cool.

Discussing their reasons for engaging in shopping locally as a practice with the participants eventually led to the idea that it means something for the broader community. For some, the motivation is to keep a business running so that the community can benefit more broadly by its presence. For others, it is recognition of how their shopping practices help to sustain individuals as part of the community. In the next section, the ways that local shopping practices directly contribute to the downtown as a community are discussed.

Community Consciousness

The practices of participants who shop locally, as well as those who own businesses in the downtown area, ultimately shape the options available for local shopping, which, in turn, shape the culture of the downtown community. In this theme, three sub-themes emerged that help to establish the link between local shopping and the downtown community: (1) *In Support of People*, (2) *A Consumption of Caring*, and (3) *We're All in this Together*. Each is presented in turn within this section.

In Support of People

Participants shared views as to the broader importance of the practice of shopping locally. Many conveyed their interests in matters such as the well-being of other people, sustainability, and supporting the efforts of local individuals. One participant who shops locally, Janet, shared her overall point of view on local shopping, stating,

J: I grew up in a very small town, and we didn't have anything, not any chains, nothing, we had nothing whatsoever, so every business you went to was like your cousin or your neighbor. You just knew the person. So I've just always had that mentality to support local people.

Although Janet explained that, for her, local shopping has to do with her upbringing, other participants shared similar commitments to the practice, yet from different angles. Ethan explained,

E: It's personal for me. In MBA school, all it does is teach you how to min-max everything, to gut people's salary, to make a penny more off of each person who has a salary, and I just like, became so frustrated that it's all viewed for profit. So to me, I was like...all this taught me was everything I could do to make a difference, it was like the anti-degree.

When it comes to shopping locally, Ethan shared his personal observations about a disconnect between what people say and what they practice:

E: It's so funny to encounter this, the majority of people want to tell you...how great it is to support local brands, but those same people are the ones who go to Costco every Sunday after church. So, it's funny to me, that there's this custom of practicing and preaching opposites. For me, it's interesting because people who...the ideologies of people who say they love to shop local but don't practice what they preach [sighing----shaking his head and rolling his eyes].

Although Ethan's excerpt points to a gap between the values people talk about and how they actually behave, other participants shared how their philosophy on local shopping directly relates to understanding the benefits that come from supporting small businesses. Heather, a participant who shops at Abigail's yarn store stated,

H: I like shopping local because I know that the money I give them is gonna go to someone's college, or [toward] keeping their lights on, not into a corporate account up in Delaware or wherever, and get put in a hedge fund, so the idea that I'm helping neighbors to continue, and to help their own neighbors....I'm contributing to the whole cycle...and that thought is really appealing to me and I like the idea of that.

Heather's perspective on the practice of local shopping is that it is a way to contribute to individuals in her community as well as to continue a cycle of giving. Similarly, Victoria, another participant who shops locally, stated,

V: I actually prefer that [local shopping] more because it keeps the dollars in our community, it keeps us thriving as a city, I prefer if I can't shop online I prefer to shop locally... I think that what they [locally-owned retailers] bring to the community they've worked really hard for, that it's I think...I like hearing their stories...about how they got started, about what drives them.

Although Victoria admits that she often shops online for the sake of convenience, it is support for local entrepreneurs that prompts her to go downtown, and the fact that she wants to keep it local. Ethan strongly believes that a focus on local shopping can shape the community. He explained,

E: The Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) talks about how micro-economies can create economic value and create community support when the PPP ratio is improved, and the ratio is how many times that currency changes hands inside a boundary before it leaves that country's boundary, and in the United States it's like...1.8 transactions before the money leaves, and that's in general, across the USA, and like in rural Brazil, money changes hands 48 times before it leaves the country. So when you take that theory in very elementary form and you apply it to say, like made in the USA clothing, if all these stores do is improve that transaction amount from 1.8 to 2.8 then...we're stimulating the economy almost 60% more effectively by shopping here. So if there are more people buying and selling locally, and more businesses caring about what they're selling, there's like this synergy created.

According to Ethan, the combined effects created through the practices of buying and selling locally can significantly impact a community by providing it with substantial economic support.

Liam shared how he thinks his practice of local store ownership contributes to the culture of local shopping based on the types of products he offers to his customers. He said,

L: A lot of people talk about the concept of something being handmade, and small-batch, and local, and for like jeans, the durability and quality of what we carry [small-batch, locally-made] versus what you can get in a department store, it's very different so...they like that we can sell them something that will last a long time and on top of that we will repair them for free if they bust, and knowing they're purchasing something that wasn't made in a factory in Bangladesh is...a lot of our customers are really very conscious of what they are buying.

Liam's practice of providing durable, locally-made merchandise is just one example of how his store contributes to the overall culture of shopping locally and the community of downtown. When considered together with other local shopping and local business ownership practices, the impact is truly magnified. Moreover, Liam also talked about the practice of sharing his approach to socially conscious consumption with his customers who practice local shopping. Liam said:

L: It's a much different mindset [referring to the merchandise turnover], what we carry and how much we carry. Our stuff doesn't go out of style, at least for a long time, so that aspect means less mindless consumption, as opposed to the *new season, new stuff* mentality...because people don't need to replace this stuff as much. We do have to stock more interesting things if I want to stay in business. We don't have massive turnover of new inventory for each season, but we may bring in a few really thoughtful items, or make a few thoughtful items and just keep with that concept of, *If you need something like this, then this item is a better choice to spend your money on versus ordering like fifty styles of new beanies and throwing them out there and then putting them on clearance at the end of the season.* So we're trying to offer things on a *less is more* mentality. We bring in less, we offer less, a little atypical for the normal retail store people are used to these days.

With respect to the different consumption mindset that local shopping prompts, Ethan details the combined potential effect of local shopping on people, explaining,

E: You come here, or there, and shop here and....say a percentage of that goes to the business and a percentage goes to pay their friends who make their products and they may use that money to employ anyone in their work force who went and ate dinner at a local restaurant and then if we take a portion of our salary and buy a beer at a local brewery who in turn is also doing the same thing...You synergize that and that PPP ratio in this community can be far greater than it is in places like New York and Los Angeles. So my hope is, the hope I have is that people buy locally and there's a quantification of your purchases...and your money, and where it goes, and you know how many people that company employs, and you know where things are made...And knowing that information should make the item more valuable to you because if you know you are supporting a neighbor

nearby, or at least within our country, maybe then they will have the urgency to then do the same thing and maybe create that snowball effect.

Ethan makes a connection between the value of the practice of local shopping and the value of the item. When combined, they can serve to strengthen the community by benefitting the individuals who have a stake in it.

In addition to the economic support offered by local shopping, some participants who shop locally emphasize its role in providing more “environmentally friendly” alternatives. For example, Courtney indicated “It’s about the environmental sustainability...that’s what’s important to me and it affords that.” Similarly, Sadie is another participant who talked about how the practice of shopping locally allows her to “Choose environmentally friendly items that are produced responsibly too.” For her, shopping locally is a practice that combines sustainability with support for ethical production. Megan shared a similar point of view when she indicated, “It [shopping locally] helps the local economy and local businesses, and [the product] is often times [from] a more environmentally aware company too.”

According to the data, local shopping is a practice motivated by the conscious desire to support people, including those who own the stores and, in turn, to benefit downtown and the local community as a whole. Participants who purchase local products at local stores in order to quantify the social benefits, and local store owners who seek to provide this opportunity for shoppers, do so with the well-being of other people in mind and with hopes of helping the community. For participants, local shopping is a practice

that can help others, and as will be discussed next, can actually be a consumption practice that fosters caring.

A Consumption of Caring

Interpretation of the meanings of local shopping as a practice highlight the extent to which the well-being of others is important to participants. The data reveal that the business owners and their employees in particular share a concern for others in the community, whether it is their own customers or those of other businesses within the downtown, and this concern is acted on through their practices. For example, Cassandra, a store manager, indicated that she is aware of the collective impact of the business when she said, “Sometimes we're sewing in the back, fixing jeans, and we're supporting other local businesses as well here with what we buy, so we're really on both ends of it.” Liam also talked about the practices that his business engages in for the benefit of the community, sharing “My business partner Eric, he knows a lot about textiles, he gives talks to book clubs and organizations. He likes giving his time to teach people about the textile history of our city.” Abigail also shared a story about how her practices as a business owner demonstrate her care for people in the community. She explained,

A: It's not just a supply store, it's a place for people who like to make soft, protective things with their hands... they want their hands to be busy and productive, even if they are watching Netflix, so they don't feel like they just wasted time watching a movie. You also want to make something pretty and soft, probably for a loved one, so you feel satisfaction that you've given them something that is nice to look at, will protect them from the elements, and when they wear it they will think of you. There's a lot of emotional need and attachment to the idea of coming up with the idea, putting your time and effort into [a project], usually with an end recipient in mind, the love you bear for that person is in the project. It's mental health to relax and [you get] emotional satisfaction from doing it.

Abigail's excerpt reveals a deep interest in the well-being of her customers. She went on to talk about how she cares about helping young kids and even uses her store to empower them, saying,

A: I have younger customers, this is not a granny craft anymore, this is something that a six year-old can learn, and stick with, and make things and...I don't know, even teenagers can keep themselves out of trouble because they are being creative and have control over something in their hands when they don't have control over so many other aspects of their life...home, school, and everything else they feel powerless about, but they can be empowered controlling what they make, what color it is, how long it is, how thick it is, who they're going to give it to.

Margaret is another business owner who demonstrates caring for her customers in the practice of store ownership by prioritizing local over online customers. She said,

M: We sell things on eBay too...I'll post things and sell them there. I always give people here a fair chance first. Usually after a few weeks [of displaying the item in the store] I'll put things on eBay...and I'll have it for \$45 in the store, and then eventually put it on eBay for \$85 and sell it.

Offering products to local shoppers first, and at lower prices, are specific practices that Margaret employs out of concern for those who shop at her store. In a similar vein, Liam talked about specific practices he engages in to demonstrate care for his customers. He shared the following thoughts:

L: We want to offer something that is...you know when you are making a purchase that it is more than about making a purchase, and that we weren't just wanting you to just come in so we can cram new product down your throat, the *you've got to buy our stuff* attitude, but an opportunity for you to think about the things that you own and the things that you buy, and [that you'll] buy better things, or maybe even less things. So that kind of mindfulness and mindset is something we hope we provide, and something that may become a ripple effect

into other realms of your life, and other purchases from us or not...maybe not the best business plan, or most lucrative [laughs], but...that's my hope.

Not only does Liam's interest in the well-being of his customers' lives mean providing them with products that prompt them to be mindful of their consumption habits, but doing so actually takes precedence over his own financial gain.

Another example of caring that emerged through the practices of local business owners is one that Abigail provided as she talked about the interest she has in one of her small vendors, and how she contributes to its growth. In talking about the local yarn producer discussed in the previous chapter, she shared:

A: I followed that particular person, and I find out that her business has done well its first year, and so the dyeing was taking over her whole house so she looked into buying a property, and she bought an eighteenth-century church, she took out the pews, they've been painting, and made the whole thing into a studio. They've taken pictures. Now I'm feeling like I got to be part of that because my money that I spent on yarn my customers love is helping this person and her employees to develop and to experiment with their own creativity and to grow their business and spread their exposure a little bit. So, I get satisfaction out of that too, it's not just my customers, I'm also a customer of all of these manufacturers and it's all interwoven and it's all bigger and bigger cogs as you go.

Abigail clearly sees herself and the choices she makes as being integral to the success of an entire community of people. Interestingly, Naomi, a representative from the Chamber of Commerce, seems to echo Abigail's practices of caring when noting that, "They're [local business owners] giving back to the community indirectly, maybe it's their product that they sell, but then they also donate it to help out.... They're doing some very

important work down here.” Naomi recognizes how, as business owners, they contribute to the good of all by what they do.

Based on the data, local store owners also support specific social causes through their practices. For example, Abigail donates some of her products for fundraising events. She said “There are organizations in town who ask for raffle items, so I try to donate, or give, to help in ways that I can, and it gets my own name out.” Although she recognizes that such donations may result in some publicity for her store, the primary goal of doing so is to help others. Likewise, Sabine engages in practices of caring for the community by donating store items for various charities. She said,

S: I don't get out in the community like I'd like to, or like I used to, so we donate a lot to various auctions and charities. I have two small children and my husband works out of town a lot, so right now this is how I participate in the community...

Another way that participants who own businesses demonstrate an interest in the well-being of others is through participation in local groups that address downtown community needs and issues. For instance, to this end, Liam talked about how he interacts with several business owners in the downtown area, saying:

L: With business owners, there are several who have gotten on committees, or started committees, or have somehow been involved with the process of trying to, or wanting to fine tune things like parking, for instance to have a free place to park...it was highly regulated, it still is, but it's better because business owners have tried to make the area more accessible. And weird things like that, are things that conversations have started to change.... You can't do much about it, but the conversations help them know that people want to do something about it.

One of the ways that Liam practices positive change has been to take an active role in the area. Liam shared “I’m on the Board of Directors for the Downtown Residents Association, it’s a network, but not a lot happens, it’s for everybody who’s interested in downtown or business owners in downtown, it’s just not common knowledge I suppose.”

Interestingly, Liam is not the only business owner who has gotten involved in the community in an effort to help the greater good. Greg, owner of the local brewery shared,

G: We got involved with the local community, the South end, the residents and merchants here, it’s a nonprofit to promote the area and we got involved with the DCI [Downtown Claremont Incorporated] board too, we came to be invested in the neighborhood. We formed the non-profit, it was informal before, but some of these more independent types of business owners, well, they’re busy and we didn’t get the buy in we’d like to, but many of these business owners haven’t been able to get the ball rolling, they’d tried before, we all have limited time. People don’t have the time to invest.

Although Greg indicates that some of his practices to help local businesses have been unsuccessful, the intentions of such efforts are for the civic good of the downtown.

Margaret is another business owner who discussed the problems that business owners experience in their efforts to be active in the community. She said,

M: There’s a lot of informal networking, but the formal just hasn’t gelled, we thought there would be more interest with people trying to promote things, but there just isn’t. Everyone is busy just trying to get stuff done---or they get approached, *Can you sponsor this, Can you donate this...*

Regardless of the different practices that business owners engage in to show their concern for the community, each demonstrates an interest in the greater good. For some

business owners, it is a desire to offer a specific type of place or products for their customers, while for others, practices include offering their time or donations of store merchandise for the good of the community. An interest in the well-being of others is also revealed through the communal perspective of what such practices mean for the downtown area, a perspective that is discussed further in the next section.

We're All in this Together

Participants' practices relative to local shopping and local businesses ownership reflect a desire to help the community and those within it, but also appear to be motivated by concern for revitalization of the downtown area. For example, one practice that seems to reflect concern for downtown revitalization is through conversations among people. In other words, spreading the word. For example, Liam shared his perspective on how this word of mouth contributes to the momentum of revitalization efforts, saying, "More conversation, which is great...more people are bringing up the issues and wanting downtown to be revitalized, and to continue the process rather than have it stalled. Conversations with customers, business owners and even the media, they're happening."

James, who shops downtown, thinks that one way he is helping to promote downtown and the businesses within it is via his social media activity. James tends to eat at a lot of restaurants downtown and he likes to share these experiences through his social media accounts. He explained, "It piques peoples' interest when I talk about places that aren't chains. I think people may check it out then... sometimes they comment, saying they've never heard of the place, or later they tell me they tried it too." Janice offered another example of how she promotes an interest in downtown through the practice of

word of mouth. She said, “If I find something awesome, like a new place, I tell everyone I know about it, and hopefully they'll go too.” Evelyn also talked about the ways that she tries to promote the downtown area by spreading the word:

E: Where I come from, Bennington, they're amazed that I come downtown...to the Christmas festival, Day of the Dead....People don't know about it in Bennington. I try to tell people about it and everything going on, but people here don't travel, they stay in their little circle and they don't go anywhere or do things.

Although Evelyn suggests that not everyone is receptive or interested, through her practice of sharing her experiences with others she tries to encourage people to visit the downtown area and check out the events that are happening there.

Rachel thinks that she contributes to the culture of revitalization in the downtown through her practice of shopping there, and points to a cultural shift that has positively impacted the identity of the downtown area. She explained,

R: I am confident that some of the funding and developer folks have contributed to what is going on down here, but I feel like it is more complicated than that though. I mean, I've seen the art scene starting to get cooler here over time, I think there's some like cultural shifts with like what more young people are interested in...I'm 29, so not the youngest but I feel like our parent's generation was more interested in the suburban retail kind of stuff and I think the younger folks who are coming in and starting to be running things and starting things are wanting to have more of a city feeling. It's just a different type of culture, really.

Rachel's comments suggest that a desire for a different culture than the one she knew growing up contributes to practices that end up promoting downtown culture. Emily, another participant who shops downtown, thinks that Greg's brewery is a place that has impacted downtown revitalization efforts. She even shared her feelings on the fact that

the brewery is leaving the downtown area, saying “I hope Marshalls moving doesn't [cause it to] fold, but I think something cool will come, and all these places contribute....I think it's a really shitty choice that they're moving, but...that's my two cents.” Emily feels that the brewery's presence is a strong contributor to the success of the downtown revitalization efforts. In contrast, Greg, who is the owner of the brewery, does not feel that his practice of local business ownership has been vital to downtown revitalization. He said, “Us leaving, won't harm the businesses [downtown], I think someone else will come in who fits in with the new neighborhood.” Greg's comment and description of the *new* neighborhood suggests that a certain amount of revitalization has already occurred, and, notably, that he does not think his brewery deserves the credit for these changes.

According to Liam, participants who own businesses downtown are engaging in practices that help promote the community as a whole and other businesses within it. For instance, Abigail described how she often engages customers in conversations about downtown and the shopping opportunities it affords. The passage below details how she often talks with shoppers about the overall area:

A: I'm part of the welcoming crew....I point out things, like, people to the restaurants I've tried and what they have...specifics like, I like, like this particular dish here or there. I tell them about the bakery or explain that if a restaurant here in town sells cheesecake they probably get it from Alex, that they have over 30 flavors so you should go over and look and I say *Go bring me some back* [laughs] it kind of makes them feel at ease. It depends on what they're looking for and I can tell them about what I've experienced....If they're looking for clothes I pull out the map and say, *Here's what you need*, and I tell them, *If there's something cute, come back and tell me*. I try to rope them in and make them feel like we're on the same side, I'll say *Have you been here? I haven't, but go, and tell me what you think*. I've had people on the way back to their car pop their head back in and say, *We went here, or there, we had this, and this...and you have to try this, or, that*.

And I tell them, *Thank you*, because the feedback isn't just for the shop but I can recommend it for other people.

Abigail's description of how she talks with shoppers, and especially encouraging them to visit other businesses in the downtown, demonstrates her concern for others and the success of the downtown, as oftentimes the outcome is unrelated to the success of her own particular store.

Katherine, who manages a coffee shop, shared how she thinks practices related to a culture of caring about downtown are actually aiding in revitalization. She explained,

K: It's contagious, that energy...it perpetuates, it becomes part of everything, it's what we do here...and it goes back to the relationships, developing relationships, it's seeded and supported across the whole thing, it's intimate connections, it's unique. We're being creative, communicative, culturing the natural aspect of human nature. It's that collective consciousness, people wanting to do more for the bigger picture.

Katherine's perspective suggests that the downtown revitalization efforts are the result of people working together for the sake of improving the entire city. However, according to a representative from the non-profit partnership organization *Buy Local First*, Lucy explained that not all business owners in the downtown have such positive feelings about the energy Katherine refers to. Lucy shared:

L: Some of the downtown business owners are not that positive because it has been quite the journey. Milly and Miles.....So [the owner] still works, but without a storefront, she was in that vanguard of people who settled and opened a storefront after downtown died, she manufactured her clothing line downtown. She's not all cheerful about it, but she understands the importance of shopping local.

Lucy's comment suggests that practices concentrated on revitalization efforts have not had a positive effect on all of the business owners who have attempted to contribute to the revitalized downtown landscape. Although Lucy shared a negative account of one business owner, Julia, a participant from the organization called Downtown Claremont Inc., talked about a shift she has observed and practices that she feels are fundamental to the culture of revitalization. She explained,

J: Nationally, I think people are realizing that we've had the suburban sprawl and people are coming back downtown because that's where they want to be, to live, to walk to work, to walk to dinner, and I think that's made a big difference. I also think that the businesses in our downtown have helped because it brings people downtown to work and they want to stay after work...it's been a big thing.

As Julia noted, a cultural shift may be occurring, and daily practices like working, living, and shopping downtown are ways people can experience the culture and contribute to downtown revitalization.

The different ways that businesses add to the cultural experience of downtown is another aspect of revitalization that was mentioned by participants. For example, Alex, who shops downtown, shared that he follows several of the local businesses on social media and said, "the gathering places kind of help to just spread that feeling [of community], I guess, or mentality of it, like they're always posting what's going on in downtown, the theaters, breweries, restaurants...or whatever." When asked which places he was referring to, he mentioned Greg's brewery and Bradley's bookstore as two of the businesses that tend to promote events in the downtown area. For example, a particular

downtown festival that was promoted on Greg's social media account is illustrated in Figure 12.



Figure 12. Example of Social Media posting of a Downtown Community Event (#1)

Although some participants who shop locally think that events are practices that contribute to revitalization of the downtown, Margaret thinks that they are not always that successful. She explained, “We did a music festival a couple weeks ago, the stage was in front of Knoll Hill, [there was] a food truck, [they] sold Marshalls beer, but we couldn't get a lot of participation.” Liam talked about how he wants to see local businesses participate in downtown events, but that the geographic layout of the area can make it difficult,

L: We participate [in events] as much as we can. There aren't a lot of events downtown that are all encompassing. First Fridays, Festival of Lights in December, and Fun Fourth in July...and those take up all downtown, otherwise, because our downtown is so linear and long, in a way...you can have an event down at the park [Bowery park] and you'd never know it over here. It's nice to be involved in things but we can only be involved in things right here. We'd love to see more down here and make sure we're open and visible and trying to help the area seem full and vibrant and for people to see what's possible.

The downtown Festival of Lights that Liam mentions is something Bradley promotes on his store's social media account (see Figure 13) and something Abigail also talked about, yet she is not always able to participate, explaining,

A: I participate if I can, I extend my hours for events like First Fridays.....I can't do something like that during the tree-lighting ceremony because they close down the street and its, it looks like Mardi Gras, the street is so packed but, but as far as participating, I try to, in that I tell people about what is happening or what is coming up.

Sabine also talked about practices she engages in for promoting the events downtown, even though her store has experienced a drop-off in attendance during some of them. Sabine said, "We do emails every First Friday telling them about the First Friday events downtown, and telling [them] what's going on in the store that month." Sabine, also shares news about downtown and promotes the culture of downtown revitalization through her practices related to social media. As an example, Sabine shared a social media post by a nonprofit organization promoting activities and events occurring in the downtown area (see Figure 14).

A: The more [foot] traffic I see on the streets or in and out of shops kind of draws you in...It's like a herd mentality, you don't want to be left out of the possibility of finding something new or cool or good. Whereas if I see a bunch of people going in and out of a store like Best Buy or Target, I just think about the crowds and I don't want to deal with the fuss, I'd just go somewhere else. It's a totally opposite feeling when you're downtown or in a local shop.

Alex's comment suggests that the culture emerging from downtown revitalization is a motivating factor for his practices in support of the businesses in the area.

A variety of practices emerged from the interpretation of data that appear to be designed to support shopping local in the downtown area. Such practices include sharing news about local establishments on social media, directing shoppers to other businesses within the downtown, and participating in a cultural shift prompting revitalization.

Regardless of the nature of the practice, a sense of excitement and attitude of caring about the downtown is clear, as is a sense of community support. In addition to the personal and social practices engaged in by participants, formal organizations also appear to be contributing to revitalization of downtown through the practice of developing partnerships, which is discussed next.

Partnerships as Practices

Although practices that are personal and social are important to understanding the deeper meanings of local shopping, based on the data collected for this dissertation, it appears that local organizations can also play a significant role. Considering the uniqueness of the downtown area and the diversity afforded by the different types of businesses there (e.g., bars, boutiques), practices employed by several different organizations to promote the downtown also help. Indeed, there are multiple non-profit

organizations with an interest in the community, the downtown area, and downtown businesses. Each organization offers different benefits and services to business owners. Perceptions of the practices each organization uses and the level of participation in these practices among business owners vary from participant to participant. To address these differences, three key organizations and their practices are examined: (a) *The Local Chamber of Commerce*, (b) *Downtown Claremont Incorporated*, and (c) *Buy Local First*.

The Local Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce is a nationwide organization that is known for taking an interest in advancing local communities by furthering the interests of local businesses within them. In the case of the Claremont Chamber of Commerce, the chamber has multiple non-profit branches organized under the main “Chamber of Commerce” designation. However, when asked what kind of practices the chamber and its system of organizations uses to reach out to and stay involved with local retail businesses in the downtown area, Cindy, who is a representative of the chamber replied, “We don't have a specific sort of retail support.” Similarly, when the same question was posed to Naomi, also a chamber representative, she responded that “Our focus is economic development, we’re working to attract businesses to our community and to expand in our community.” The Chamber of Commerce’s lack of programs focused specifically on retail businesses is not lost on the independent retailers included in this dissertation. Accordingly, only two of the nine retail business sites held active memberships with the Claremont Chamber of Commerce at the time of data collection.

When participants were asked about why they either have or have not joined the chamber, they had varying responses. For example, Abigail stated:

A: I hate to say it, but I really don't even know what they do, I mean, I've heard of them of course, but what do they do? And if I join them, what does that mean and what do I have to do then?

Along with being unaware of the role of the Chamber of Commerce, Abigail fears that the cost of membership will add more responsibilities to her already very limited time, as well as stretch her small budget. As she put it, "That's three months of my phone and Internet bill..." Perceived lack of value of the chamber's practices and the cost of membership, combined with a lack of knowledge about the organization, makes membership unappealing to her. Likewise, Annalisa is unsure of the payoff she would get from membership:

A: I need to ask them more. They had a rep come down and talk to me about it, and basically for me, I think what the chamber could offer me is that authentication piece, but...their mixers and stuff, ummm with a baby and all, I don't know how many of those I could attend.

Although Annalisa views membership in the Chamber of Commerce as a way to validate her newly established business, for her, the reality is that she is not likely to take advantage of events or the benefits they offer due to the responsibilities in her personal life.

Margaret is more aware of the purpose of the Chamber of Commerce, but stated, "I don't really see the benefits of joining...I like meeting people more naturally and not in

organizational type meetings.” In addition to the lack of value, Margaret’s overall disinterest in formal organizations solidified her decision not to join the local chamber.

Sabine joined the Chamber of Commerce upon opening her boutique, but soon found that the timing of the networking events sponsored by the chamber was not conducive to retail businesses. She stated, “Every time I see the emails, the events are billed *after-hours*. Sure, if you work in an office, but in a retail store...lunch hours and after five are my busiest times of the day.” This drawback is also recognized by the participants who represent the chamber organization. For example, Lindy acknowledged, “Most of our traditional retailers do not attend events because they are small businesses and have to be present during their open hours.” For many of the store owners in this study, the practice of joining the chamber is not something they think will help them to succeed as businesses, or help to create positive change within the downtown in terms of revitalization.

Most participants are simply unsure of how much value there is in a Chamber of Commerce membership. When I asked Lindy about the benefits the chamber offers specific retailers, she responded,

L: We help make connections so companies are able to achieve their overall objectives. How do we do that? If they are looking for new customers, we can help them with marketing efforts and personal introductions. If they need products and services, we can introduce them to companies who may be able to provide those. We offer educational opportunities, networking opportunities and we advocate on behalf of business with local and state elected officials. We are the principle economic and community development organization in that we are responsible for attracting new business and helping existing industry expand to keep Claremont a growing community.

Although all of the benefits suggested by Lindy are noteworthy, and may be useful to some downtown business owners, the perception among those in this study is that such benefits and services are either not needed, or out of touch with their most pressing business concerns. For instance, when brewery owners Samantha and Greg were asked about their decision to not join, Greg offered the following reason:

G: The benefits don't really do a lot for a business like us. The lead generation networking really works better for insurance agents, bankers, realtors, etc, you know, people like that....And the seminars don't offer a lot of content that is helpful for us. And we are not in a position to do advertising, so the negotiated member rates don't help us.

While Greg and Samantha do not think that their particular business would benefit from the services of the local Chamber of Commerce, they also cite the high cost of membership as part of the reason why they decided not to join.

Another disconnect, as explained by Annalisa, surfaces when she weighs costs of membership in the chamber with those of joining another local non-profit organization:

A: They both offer events like happy hours for members, but it doesn't seem like many small retailers are part of the chamber and if I want to get help from a networking event, I need people who understand my situation.

Annalisa thinks that even if she had the ability to attend chamber events, she would not benefit in a way that would help her business. Other business owners shared similar concerns related to the size of their business and how chamber membership may not be the best choice for their dollars. Eric expressed it this way, "The chamber is decent; [but] I honestly don't understand the point of membership unless you want some weight in city

legislation, but really, how much say do you get when their other members are people like Wells Fargo?” Eric believes that as a small business owner, his voice does not have the same power as those members representing much larger organizations. As local business owners, participants revealed that they carefully consider the practices that they engage in, and joining the Chamber of Commerce is not something they think will result in change for the greater good.

In answer to these concerns, Naomi attempted to affirm the chamber’s support of local businesses stating that, “More of the money stays here, they have more of a vested interest in the overall community....it’s an altogether different type of experience.” Although she values the practices of local businesses, she also recognizes the shortcomings of chamber offerings, and explained, “We have more local retailers who want to be engaged with the community than the big box....We do so much to support entrepreneurs, but it’s disconnected.” Acknowledging the void in local retailer memberships, Naomi went on to say:

N: Every business in this community matters and helps us to get to where we are. Are they all members? No they’re not, but we have to offer value to them, and if they want to be a part of the work we’re doing, we have to create that desire in them [so] that it becomes important to them.

While the level of support that the Chamber of Commerce offers entrepreneurs and small businesses within the city is evident, at the same time, a lack of support specific to retail is also evident. In talking about the ways that the chamber supports business owners, Naomi stated:

N: It's a very personal touch with the business owners. It's a very friendly community, people are pleased to introduce you to someone else, it's very welcoming and we are intentional about being inclusive. We want to create that culture, we want to connect those who are under-connected, intentionally reaching out to under-connected groups, it's on us to make sure we're doing a good job of building awareness.

The disconnects between the Chamber of Commerce and the downtown retail businesses extend beyond member events and lack of value-added benefits. As previously mentioned, the cost of chamber membership is a concern that many participants expressed. When Greg and Samantha were asked why they decided to join a different nonprofit organization focused on downtown instead of the Chamber of Commerce, Greg replied, "Frankly, they [the Chamber of Commerce] cost about twice as much to join." The cost of a membership, paired with irrelevant benefits offered by the organization resulted in Greg and Samantha's practice in support of another non-profit organization in the community.

Echoing concerns about membership cost, Abigail described how she looked into joining the local Chamber of Commerce by doing a little bit of research online because she had not actually been approached by anyone with the organization. Based on her recollection, Abigail stated, "I don't remember the exact breakdown, but it was something like 1-50 employees was \$500 a year. What about a discount for the first few years? And c'mon, one employee compared with fifty...that's a huge difference." Although Abigail's recollection of membership rates does not represent the precise breakdown for the number of employees, she is correct in saying in that membership dues start at \$495, no matter the size of the business. When Lindy was asked about the cost of

memberships and whether or not the chamber offers introductory rates to new businesses, she replied, “The rates are the same for a new business or an established one, we will, however, let new businesses make payments on their dues.”

The cost of a Chamber of Commerce membership is a shared concern amongst participants and a major disconnect between the organization and its potential members, to the extent that Bradley, a participant who has been a member of the Chamber of Commerce stated, “Funny you should ask...I just got my, ummm, four or five-hundred-dollar renewal notice in the mail and I'm just thinking...hmmm, do I really need to do that?” As one of only two local retail businesses who were members of the at the time of data collection, Bradley’s hesitation to maintain his membership indicates that a serious gap in value is evident not just to those local retailers who are not members, but even to those who are.

Overall, it is apparent that the participants who have not joined the local area Chamber of Commerce do not see the value a membership offers their practice of local business ownership, beyond Annalisa’s mention of “authentication.” The cost of the membership, coupled with the inability of most participants to participate in Chamber of Commerce events, appears to have solidified the justification for not joining. In addition, the participants face pressure to join many organizations, including some that offer a focus that is more relevant to their particular needs. As will be discussed next, one such organization appears to engage in practices that are more germane to the store owners that are a part of this study.

Downtown Claremont Incorporated

Along with the local Chamber of Commerce, another organization that participants who are business owners frequently mentioned is Downtown Claremont Incorporated (DCI). When speaking with Jane, a representative from DCI, about the actual focus of the organization, she described it this way:

J: To work with the businesses downtown and try to support them...to drive people to the businesses downtown. We work on large scale economic development and bringing new buildings and jobs to downtown as well...working on the marketing, branding downtown...all sorts of things.

According to Jane, DCI seeks to recognize the vital role that locally-owned retailers play in the downtown area. When specifically asked how DCI feels about the local businesses and what they offer to the community, Jane responded,

J: They absolutely offer so many benefits, people will, like *Cantina*...they opened and people wanted to come...loved it, they loved the atmosphere, the food and they wanted to.....These businesses create destinations downtown, destinations that people want...it's an atmosphere they come for...something they can't find anywhere else if that makes sense. And, all of the shops down here are local, things you can't find anywhere else really, that's *huge*. It's the environment...people want to walk, people want to be able to feel the vibrancy, and that's what downtown does, it offers a uniqueness you just don't get at the Gallery Center, the mall or really anywhere else.

Jane is clearly enthusiastic about the downtown area and the contributions made by businesses within it. Interestingly, this enthusiasm about and dedication to the downtown area was remarked upon by participants who are local business owners and even those of other nonprofit organizations, such as the chamber.

Several participants shared positive sentiments about DCI's practices and how the organization works to support businesses downtown and connect them as a community. For example, Abigail stated that "They [DCI] are the closest thing we have to a network downtown." Likewise, Liam referred to DCI as "kind of the overarching group for the downtown," however, he explained that while they are "ever-present...they don't necessarily weave the stores and businesses together or keep us connected....It's still up to us." Annalisa, whose business is the most recent to open in downtown, attributes much of the change in the downtown, and particularly the area "south of the tracks" to practices undertaken by DCI, which opened its physical office there. She explained, "DCI being on that corner and having a street-front presence and campaigning for that end of Oak street is huge."

Sabine commented that she has a genuine partnership with DCI. She regularly communicates with the organization, especially about upcoming First Friday events. Sabine mentioned the decreasing foot traffic in her store on recent First Fridays and said she has "been talking to DCI...we're trying to figure out what to do and we're brainstorming some ideas to increase traffic in the store again." She explained that she now has events planned for the holiday season as a result of these collaborative discussions. By the same token, when Jane was asked about her interaction with the local businesses in the downtown area, she replied that one practice she is invested in is spending a great deal of her time on getting the word out:

J: Advertising what they're doing...a sale, an event, they communicate that to me and I help promote them....Or sometimes it's street closures...I let them know when things like that will occur, or if there are events and how they can

participate in these events. Also, if they have issues they can come to us, we are the middleman between the city and the businesses.

When Jane was asked to explain how communication occurs between DCI, businesses, and even customers, she replied:

J: It depends. We have a distribution, a weekly email blast we distribute to about five thousand people----whoever signs up, so we can put things in our email, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram that we put thing on as well. Some of them [businesses] utilize that more than others. We also share retailers' posts online, we get people tagging other people if they want to go to events we've publicized...it depends on the post, social media is so convoluted these days.

Involvement with the organization depends on the business. That is, DCI's involvement is entirely dependent on the willingness of the business to communicate with them. As Jane said, "if they give us the information, we'll promote it," suggesting that some businesses make use of the organization's assistance more than others.

When Jane was asked whether DCI works alone or partners with other organizations in the city, she responded:

J: We focus on downtown; we have boundaries we work within. The chamber is [located] downtown, but the chamber is city-wide...and they're membership based with paying members. Ours do not have to pay anything...if they're in our geographic area we support them.

While DCI is known for its positive relationships with downtown businesses and non-profit organizations alike, it is important to note that they have the advantage of not charging membership fees, and therefore their practices are viewed very positively by businesses within the downtown area.

DCI's practices have not only impacted businesses, but have also made an impact on customers. When one participant who shops downtown, Pippa, was asked whether she feels a sense of community downtown, she responded that "non-profit organizations such as Downtown Residents' Association (DRA) and Downtown Claremont, Inc (DCI) both help contribute to this sense of community among residents and downtown businesses." Interestingly, when speaking with Naomi from the Chamber of Commerce about whether there are organizations that she thinks are impacting the downtown area, she remarked that "DCI is doing a great job to curate programming for festivals and working directly with the downtown businesses." Likewise, Lucy, who is with Buy Local First, another non-profit organization in the area (to be discussed next) also referred to the working relationship as "a network of caring...we work closely with DCI and we have a good relationship with them." It is evident that DCI's practices not only include building collaborative partnerships with businesses in the downtown area, but also cooperating with other non-profit organizations in the city as well as residents and visitors to the area, and in turn, positively impacting revitalization efforts.

Buy Local First

The third non-profit organization that surfaced as important to participants who own retail businesses is Buy Local First (BLF). Lucy, a representative from BLF, described the organization's purpose as "advocating for independent businesses and also acting as a resource for the community where our businesses are." She indicated that the way that BLF differs from other community partnership organizations is that their membership is restricted to businesses that are "local and independently owned...no

franchises.” While BLF has restrictions on joining, Lucy specified that, unlike the Chamber of Commerce, “Most businesses join BLF unsolicited...we just haven’t had the infrastructure to be proactive about reaching out to businesses.” When asked why she thinks that businesses seek out BLF, Lucy offered:

L: The value comes in belonging to this kind of networking group...they’re being offered free training in social media, branding, etc., they’re listed in our online and printed directories, and receiving promotion by us on social media...we have quite a few followers.

The value that BLF offers to businesses through their practices appears to be recognized by local business owners. Lucy gave an example of one of the programs they offer members:

L: Last year we had something we called “summer school” where we had someone come in and teach social media to our members and it was extremely popular...every session was full, so we know there is a need for what we’re doing. And as far as [what] the [member] businesses are doing, the networking aspect [of BLF] has been good for the businesses.

According to Lucy, businesses are taking advantage of the programming offered by BLF, but she also pointed out that membership rates are doable for small local businesses. When queried on the price of joining BLF, Lucy responded that “Young entrepreneurs can join for \$50. For farmers it’s \$75, and for others it’s \$150.” She went on to explain that “We also barter too...so if there is a case where that seems warranted, we’ll do that.”

Lucy’s explanation of the practice of offering different membership rates and flexibility in determining rates suggests greater accessibility for small business owners as

compared to other community partnership organizations. Indeed, Lucy's dedication to the organization and its work can clearly be considered one practice she herself engages in, in that she no longer receives a paycheck from BLF, because:

L: We have so little funding that it's been a full-time job to just keep the business going...I was the only staffer but I retired so we could hire someone, now I am a full-time volunteer and we have a Board of Directors of 11 people. Anything beyond the basics is difficult.

Operating on a small budget in order to make membership accessible for businesses is important to Lucy. She recounted the success she feels they have had since she joined the organization in 2009, saying, "It (BLF) had existed for 1.5yrs when I joined. It had 115 members, but it wasn't very organized and they weren't connected. Now we have 365 members and they are all very connected." She continued, "We've been somewhat successful because everyone is talking about buying local, shopping local, that's been happening since we've been in existence. No one was talking about that in 2009 in this community."

Although at the time of data collection, not all of the businesses in this study were members of BLF, six of the nine held memberships with BLF and offered varying opinions on the usefulness of the organization. For example, Greg and Samantha explained that the benefits of membership were not necessarily the reason they joined, but they like that the practice of membership focuses on the community. As Greg indicated, "It (BLF) has had some benefits in terms of exposure in their business listings you know...but not a whole lot. We really just like to support local, that is why we joined." Similarly, when asked about the store's membership with BLF, Bradley

indicated, “Yeah...we just won their small business of the year award...I don’t really know what that means, or why we won, but they sent us that lovely plaque.”

Eric thinks the value of BLF membership is in networking with other business owners who might share similar experiences, as Annalisa suggested earlier in her comparison between membership with the chamber and that with BLF. Eric, who is a board member of BLF, provided details about an app that BLF created, “A big benefit of BLF is that they spent about \$20k to build a Google integratable mapping system of local businesses. You can see a Google map of just local non-chain restaurants or local stores...” Eric described another useful benefit that BLF is planning to implement in the coming year:

E: We're slowly ramping up this card called the “Buy Local Card” which is a loyalty card like a credit card you present to BLF businesses and to non-BLF businesses because it can't be exclusive or restricted. You accumulate points and once you get so many points you like go online and you can like deploy it to whatever you want, like X number you get a \$25 gift card...a card you can redeem at a certain business...

Clearly, participants are aware of what BLF offers them, including the visibility that comes from the *Buy Local* stickers placed on the doors and check-out counters of many businesses, making the value of membership seem more obvious. BLF’s practices, in the form of programming and communications, are viewed as beneficial to revitalization by those who shop locally and those who own local businesses, making it one organization that is endeavoring to create change for the community through its practices.

Clearly, each of the three organizations have different goals and these goals are reflected in their particular practices designed to target businesses in the revitalized

downtown. However, they all share an interest in helping businesses succeed within the downtown area. Moreover, each of the organizations discussed in this section provide resources that are accessible to businesses in the downtown area, but how these resources are valued varies from participant to participant. Although the three organizations offer different benefits and at different rates, the owners of locally-owned businesses see more value in some than others and attribute the positive results of focused downtown revitalization efforts to DCI more so than to the other two organizations.

In sum, the practices participants engage in reveal both personal and social meanings behind local shopping and local business ownership, and these meanings are shared more broadly by organizations developed to support downtown revitalization efforts. For some participants, the personal pride or empowerment resulting from the practices are vital, while for others, it is the opportunity to give to others and the community through local shopping or local business ownership that is important. Regardless, practices in support of the local community seem to have a positive impact on the people involved. Each of the practices detailed in this chapter can benefit the community and assist in downtown revitalization. Perhaps most importantly, a culture of caring for others in the community and for the continued revitalization of the downtown area emerged across the data, suggesting that regardless of role, participants overall are committed to the success of the downtown and those within it.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the last of three conceptual areas used to structure the interpretation of the data. Three main thematic areas shed light on the different ways that participants' practices help to support the downtown revitalization process through a focus on "shopping local." In the next chapter, I discuss the interpretation of data from a theoretical perspective and in relation to the literature and conceptual framework guiding the study.

CHAPTER VII

THEORIZING THE INTERPRETATION

Data were collected in support of the rationale for this dissertation, which is to understand the motivations for and meanings of local shopping within the context of a revitalized downtown. Thematic interpretation of the data sheds light on local shopping as a phenomenon, specifically the *People*, the *Places* and the *Practices* that give it meaning. In order to fully explore the purpose of this study, in this chapter, the theoretical relevance of the interpretation and the implications of it are considered relative to the three core concepts outlined in Chapter II.

As the conceptual framework that forms the foundation of the study illustrates (see Figure 15), the three substantive areas of people, place and practices are interrelated and therefore influence one another in layered ways. The substantive area of *Place* encompasses the revitalized downtown, locally-owned businesses within the downtown, and the significance of sense of place as it relates to both. The substantive area of *People* includes consumers and local retail business owners linked through their consumption behaviors that are related to shopping local and specifically within the downtown area. People and Place are connected through *Practices*, for example, the practices of local shopping and local business ownership within the revitalized downtown. These interrelationships are represented by the arrows in the conceptual model, connecting people, place, and practices to highlight how participants' deeply held beliefs about their

actions motivate them to shop locally. That is, in doing so they feel that they make a difference in the lives of local business owners, and more broadly, the entire downtown.



Figure 15. Conceptual Framework

As will be explained in this chapter, much of what the interpretation of data reveals about the phenomenon can be understood via the lens of practice theory. Practice theory is a theory designed to explain how individuals, each with deeply held beliefs and intentions, can transform the communities in which they live and work through seemingly ordinary practices (Ortner, 2006). As Reckwitz (2002) points out, it is through practices, or routinized behaviors, that transformation occurs. In the case of the present study, practice theory, a general theory, is being applied specifically to local shopping and local store ownership. As such, these are situated as general practices, both of which encompass numerous specific practices that ultimately contribute to the transformation of the community in the form of downtown revitalization. Thus, in this chapter, the

discussion is organized into three primary sections to highlight how practice theory helps to illuminate the interrelationships between people, place, and practices: (1) *Valuing the Local*, (2) *Owning the Opportunities*, and (3) *Shopping for Revitalization*.

Valuing the Local

The first objective of this study was to explore the reasons why people choose to shop locally and to do so in a revitalized downtown. To this end, two guiding research questions were developed: (1) *What does shopping local mean for consumers?* and, (2) *What makes shopping locally in the downtown area distinctive for consumers?* Both questions are used to frame the discussion of how the data explain the *People*, the *Place* and the *Practices* they engage in. Both are used to explore how the three concepts contribute to downtown revitalization by way of the literature that was presented in Chapter II and relative to the conceptual model developed for this study. The following sections offer exploration of how local shopping is both a reason for and an outcome of deeply held values when situated within the context of practice theory. Dimensions of this discussion are presented in the following five sections: (a) *Consumption as Activism and Empowerment*, (b) *Civic Minded Motivations*, (c) *Socially Conscious Consumption Behaviors*, (d) *Relational Facets*, and (e) *Why Shop Locally?*

Consumption as Activism and Empowerment

A key theoretical implication of this study for the literature is that consumers who shop locally see this practice as a form of activism. Thus, shopping local means that consumers have a say in which businesses they support. Moreover, for these participants, the practice of local shopping connects people to place, in that, doing so within the

downtown area empowers them to choose unique stores and shopping experiences. As discussed in Chapters IV, V and VI, local shopping emerged as one way that participants experience empowerment, and specifically exercise this empowerment through their consumption choices. According to Atkinson (2012), socially conscious consumers understand the power of their consumption choices. In other words, they use consumption as a form of activism. Nelson, Rademacher, and Paek (2007) suggest that consumer activism has “Transformed some consumers into individuals who consciously consider the consequences of consumption” (p. 145). Indeed, the interpretation of the data collected for the present study indicates that consumer activism can be prompted by the place in which consumption occurs, for instance, at a locally-owned business. This is the case for Kayla, who explained,

K: I feel very strongly about it [shopping locally], and if I had to choose between locally-owned or a big chain I would always choose locally-owned. It helps the local economy and is oftentimes a more environmentally aware company too.

As Kayla’s statement suggests, she feels that her practice (local shopping) helps the community, thereby positively impacting the place (downtown and the stores within it).

Local shopping as a form of consumer activism can, in part, be explained through the first requirement of practice theory, which is *understanding*. Kayla’s example is illustrative of the fact that she recognizes the significance of her support for local businesses and how it can actually benefit her community. Specific to consumption, practice theory, as Zelizer (2005) suggests, posits that shopping may mean more to consumers than simply selecting items for purchase, but instead, such actions can mean

taking a stand for what one believes in. Kayla's example demonstrates that, for her, local shopping is a practice she uses to positively impact her local economy and one that even considers the environment.

The thematic interpretation suggests that participants exhibit activist behaviors not only out of the desire to help the environment or the economy, as Kayla indicated, but also because of a sense of responsibility they feel toward supporting local business owners. The desire to support the people who own local businesses, and concern for their well-being, is how some participants experience the empowerment that they credit to shopping locally. For instance, Shana, a participant who shops locally said, "If I choose to eat at national chains rather than downtown, it could be potentially detrimental to the businesses downtown.... I would rather see smaller mom and pop stores stay in business [than chains]." Shana's example considers the downtown, but also indicates her understanding of the importance of the practice of local store ownership, therefore her shopping practices are motivated not only by the connection to place, but the practices of local business ownership inherent to it. When interpreted through the lens of practice theory (Ortner, 2006), Shana's choices are clearly not driven by personal gain, but instead, are reflective of her fundamental interest in the well-being of others. In so doing, her practices positively impact local businesses within the downtown area by helping them to succeed.

The literature indicates that individuals with a high level of perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE) often engage in socially conscious consumption behaviors (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968; Webster, 1975). The interpretation of data collected for

this dissertation suggests that participants clearly believe they have the ability to positively impact others through their local shopping choices. This belief reflects Berkowitz and Lutterman's (1968) idea of PCE, as well as Warde's (2005) notion of consumption as a form of reward. For example, Victoria talked about the empowerment she experiences from her shopping habits because these habits have the potential to affect many people. She explained,

V: I feel like I make a difference when I go down there [to shop]...like one little pea or you know rock that you throw in has a rippling effect and it ends up affecting the whole body of water. So yeah, I think even though it's just me, I still make a difference when I go [shopping], and of course I'm going to talk to other people about my experiences about the service or the deals, so then my friends are going to go....So then there's more of that rippling effect. So yeah, I definitely feel like I make a difference, more than just me.

Victoria's excerpt demonstrates that her shopping practices are empowering for her, but also that through her practice of conversations with friends, she has the power to broaden the positive impact by sharing her experiences with others. Victoria's experiences explain the connection between people and practice in the way that she feels her shopping will benefit the practices of local business owners, and in turn, how this can contribute to downtown revitalization efforts. This idea, when framed by practice theory, means that a basic practice, like word-of-mouth communication, can be deliberately used to benefit others. In this case, it is by sharing positive recommendations that others may be motivated to visit a local business.

It is important to note that it is not just the participants who shop locally that experience empowerment through their choices, but the participants who own businesses

also think they are affecting positive change for other businesses through their consumption choices. For instance, Abigail, in her role as a customer of her suppliers, feels she contributes to something bigger through the choices she makes:

A: There's a sense of being a teeny tiny cog in a great big machine....Where you're producing something and you're making it all work, and if you don't do what you need to do, or don't contribute, then you help wreck the machine.

Much like participants who choose to shop locally, Abigail's supply chain practices are not self-serving, but instead, the benefits that result from supporting other independent businesses offer her an internal reward via a sense of satisfaction. According to Warde (2005), acquiring an internal reward through one's actions is a basic tenet of practice theory.

In addition to the opportunity to have a voice through the practice of choosing what kind of store to shop at (i.e., local retailers rather than big box stores), the value that shoppers think that they receive from their local shopping practices is also important. The thematic interpretation reveals that participants clearly prefer to support locally-owned businesses, in part because of the unique product offerings they offer and the statement such products help them make. As shared in Chapter V, Juliette, a participant who shops downtown suggested, "...The stuff you can get downtown is unique..." likewise, Renee said, "...Local stores often have more unique offerings..."

Uniqueness of product offerings is not the only feature brought up by participants who shopped locally. Interpretation of the data indicates that participants who shop locally also value the quality of the experience resulting from the practice, including both

product quality and service quality. For instance, Michelle mentioned “What you get in a local business is quality of service [and] quality of product...” James echoed her sentiments, stating, “You get quality...,” referring to shopping downtown at locally-owned businesses. According to Mitchell (2007), local businesses help to bring people together and create social connections, and the current study extends that notion by suggesting that support for local businesses may be strengthened by the higher levels of service and product quality that they offer shoppers. This finding also supports Warde’s (2005) assertion that consumption can provide individuals with a reward beyond simply the purchase of something necessary or valued, in that local shopping appears to be associated with rewards of higher service and product quality.

The literature has shown that locally-owned businesses are often vital to a commercial area (Miller, 1999; Robertson, 1995) and particularly areas undergoing revitalization (Sneed, Runyan, Swinney & Lin, 2011), yet little else is known about the value of such businesses for the community as a whole, or more specifically, why they are important. The present study found that local shopping, as a deliberate practice, may be viewed as a form of activism, as it offers a means to affect change in the form of supporting local business owners by ensuring their success within the downtown, and in turn, contributing to the growth and revitalization of the downtown area. Moreover, the general practice of local shopping provides shoppers with a sense of gratification for having done something good for the benefit of others, while gaining something in return that is more than just a product or experience. Specific to the guiding research questions and the ways that people, place, and practices interconnect, for participants, local

shopping means activism and empowerment. That is, shopping local supports local retail business practices while providing shoppers with unique products and service experiences. Likewise, participants' shopping practices are motivated by their commitments to the place, including the entire downtown area and the local retail businesses within it. The result of these practices means that local retail businesses remain solvent, which contributes to a revitalized downtown.

As the theoretical interpretation of data reveal, participants shop locally because it is empowering. Participants feel that they that they have the power to bring about change and directly impact the local businesses in the downtown and the people within their community who own and operate them through their practices. Such findings illustrate how practice theory can be applied to comprehend the meaning of and motivations for local shopping. Clearly, participants understand the actual value of their local shopping practices. This is the first stage of practice theory, which is understanding (Warde, 2005). Participants are carrying out these practices by supporting these businesses through their purchases. Such actions reflect the second stage, which is procedural. Ultimately, participants continue to shop locally because they feel that their actions sustain local businesses and the downtown area. Repetition of the practices indicate the third stage, or engagement (Warde, 2005). In the next section, civic duty as a reason for shopping local and as reflected in participants' practices is discussed.

Civic-Minded Motivations

In addition to activism and empowerment, an attitude of civic engagement was frequently seen among participants who shop locally, as well as those who own local

businesses. While numerous definitions of civic engagement exist, the term generally includes actions that are undertaken for the benefit of the community (Adler & Goggin, 2005). Civic engagement and locally-owned businesses are often interrelated, according to Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson, and Nucci (2002), as the business owners are frequently embedded in the local community and provide it with both economic and social support. Although locally-owned business and civic engagement are linked, how local shopping relates to these concepts has yet to be addressed. This study is the first to shed light on this linkage, which is discussed via two sub-themes: (1) *Supporting Others*, and (2) *Benefitting the Community*.

Supporting Others

The fact that local businesses are more civically engaged and invested in the community than chain stores is a practice that some participants who shop locally recognize and think is important. Naomi shared her feelings about the economic and social support local businesses provide, stating, “More of the money stays here, they have more of a vested interest in the overall community...” Likewise, participants who are local business owners shared a similar desire to contribute to the larger whole. For example, Greg commented that “We want to be a community gathering place....” This statement reflects Putnam’s (2001) definition of civic engagement, which includes informal social activities and any action that supports the community as foundational to civic engagement. Likewise, the fact that Greg and Samantha allow their brewery to be used, free of charge, for social groups and meetings, is further indication of their civic approach to running the business. Greg and Samantha’s business ownership practices

suggest that they have made deliberate choices to run their business in a way that benefits the community, rather than focusing only on the advantages it might afford them as individuals.

Moreover, the fact that Greg and Samantha offer their brewery for public use is a practice that reflects Oldenburg's (1989) concept of a "third place." A third place is a place that is neither one's home nor workplace, but a place that encourages social engagement, a sense of community, and camaraderie between individuals (Thompson & Arsel, 2004). The notion that a brewery, like Greg and Samantha's, can serve as a third place by bringing people together downtown and creating a sense of community is precisely what one participant, James, commented on, saying, "There's more of a neighborhood feel [at the brewery]." As individuals who shop locally and as individuals that make it possible to do so, through their practices, participants positively impact the community by creating social connections that serve to support the greater good.

Not only are local businesses civically engaged, but as the interpretation revealed, participants also demonstrate civic engagement through their practices related to supporting locally-owned businesses. Maddison thinks that shopping at the locally-owned businesses helps to "Keep money within our community." Similarly, Jasmine explained that "The money goes to local owners instead of corporations." Although both perspectives can be explained by Adler and Goggin (2005), who describe civic engagement as encompassing a wide range of activities that citizens may participate in for the purposes of helping to shape a community, local shopping has been an overlooked dimension of civic engagement thus far.

Yvonne recognizes that locally-owned businesses benefit the community and indicates her understanding of this notion when describing her practice of local shopping as “Investing locally...more of my money stays locally for reinvestment locally, it’s supporting a stronger city and economy.” Similarly, Victoria’s motivations for local shopping also point to a sense of civic engagement. She stated, “On the whole I feel like supporting the local businesses really helps Claremont’s economy and it keeps the economy thriving and really makes people want to come and live here and be here.” Both Yvonne and Victoria’s statements can be explained through the tenets of practice theory, in that they are motivated to support local businesses through local shopping practices because they are conscious of the wide-reaching benefits that local shopping will have on the community. Such statements highlight that some participants understand that their local shopping practices benefit more than one store, or place. Rather, because they engage in local shopping practices the entire downtown may prosper, thereby furthering the revitalization efforts. Moreover, participants revealed a desire to support the community through a range of practices beyond shopping that include volunteering and philanthropy, both of which are discussed in the next section.

Benefitting the Community

The literature on socially conscious consumers indicates that these individuals typically care deeply about their communities (Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1968; Webster, 1975). The data collected for this dissertation support this assertion, pointing to a mindset of civic engagement reflected not only in participants’ local shopping habits, but in other aspects of their behaviors. Essentially, their practices link them to the people in

the community, and demonstrate the extent to which they value the community as a whole. Specifically, alongside shopping local, acts of philanthropy and volunteering were commonly described during the interviews. For example, Emily talked about practices that she engages in, in addition to shopping local, to support people in the community, saying "...I volunteer some, I give to a few different charities..." Although he joked about being "rather self-absorbed," Tim also talked about how he gives back to the community, stating:

T: I do volunteer for a couple of nonprofits, I guess indirectly I really do care [about the community] and am a softie... I work for a couple of nonprofits who put on community events and ones that give back to local charities.

Organized volunteering practices were often described by participants as a means of connecting with and contributing to the community. As highlighted in Chapter VI, Whitney shared a recent experience that went beyond volunteering. While at an event for her church she found a way to give directly to another person in her community. She detailed:

W: I just took a big bag of clothes to this woman I met....We were serving breakfast and I got to talking to her. My kids have way more than they need, and this woman...I don't exactly know her story, or why she's starting out with next to nothing, but she was trying to get back on her feet and she has kids who are about the same ages as mine...wear the same sizes, and you know how hard that is, being a kid who looks...who everyone can tell doesn't have money and is wearing the same two or three outfits all the time....So I took her a ton of stuff, we don't need it and she was so grateful...

Whitney's story reveals the sense of civic engagement that she shows through her efforts to improve the lives of others within the community.

In sum, as discussed in Chapter II, the literature on civic engagement offers numerous definitions of the concept (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Delli-Carpini, 1997; Diller, 2001; Ehrlich, 2000; Putnam, 2001). Clearly, the interpretation of the data collected for this dissertation adds to the general understanding of civic engagement by positioning local shopping as a practice that benefits the broader community. Participants revealed that local shopping means more than simply acquiring a product or a service. Instead the practice empowers participants because it offers them a way to support people in the community through their shopping practices.

Such examples illustrate how practice theory is useful for understanding why people shop locally, and what it is about the place that motivates the practice. According to the first phase of practice theory, whether the specific practice is shopping local or another civically-motivated one, such as volunteering, people understand the importance of the practice and therefore participate in it because they recognize how it benefits others and the broader community. Thus, participants' commitment to and engagement in the practice permits them to give back through their shopping, and in some cases, through a range of philanthropic practices. Discussion of more specific ways that participants demonstrate their interest in the community is provided next.

Socially Conscious Consumption Behaviors

Although acting for change and dedication to civic engagement via local shopping are significant aspects that emerged in the interpretation of data, a variety of socially

conscious consumer behaviors also surfaced that can explain the connections between people, place, and practices and what local shopping means more broadly. As discussed, the notion of voluntary simplicity is about living simply in both theory and practice, as well as a general avoidance of conspicuous consumption (Gregg, 1936). Participants expressed similar kinds of values regarding their overall shopping practices. Three key areas emerged related to the notion of conscious consumption and are discussed here in relation to the literature: (1) *Living with Less*, (2) *Purposeful Living*, and (3) *Focusing on Value*.

Living with Less

Voluntary simplifiers often rearrange their lives in an attempt to cut back on consumption (Etzioni, 1998). One commonality participants of this dissertation share with voluntary simplifiers relates to the notion of cutting back and living with less. Stephanie, a participant who shops locally, talked about her consumption values and some of the changes she has made in life, saying, “Recently my husband and I downsized from a larger house to a smaller one. We have been carting *stuff* in boxes for years and we are choosing to live with less stuff... working to structure a better home/work balance.” Stephanie expressed the desire to simplify and cut back on consumption in order to lead a more balanced life, as the concept of voluntary simplicity suggests. Stephanie’s reduced consumption is therefore one practice she uses to communicate her values. Similarly, Jolene shared her feelings regarding the diminishing value of consumption for her. She explained that her only interest in shopping relates to things that need to be replenished, saying, “I am downsizing rather than purchasing these days,

so my consuming is the kind that needs to be repeated, as in food and drink.” Both of these excerpts offer strong support for the lifestyle choices of voluntary simplifiers, yet the extent to which local shopping is important to voluntary simplifiers remains largely unexplored within the literature.

Although some participants engage in consumer behaviors that very closely align with and support the notion of voluntary simplicity, other participants engage in practices that are only slightly reflective of the notion, yet are purposeful in nature. For instance, Victoria thinks that actually consuming more, but consuming purposefully, is one way to be socially conscious with her consumption habits. She shared, “Maybe to help others I feel sometimes I have to consume a little more to help others...” Interestingly, purposeful consumption is considered the first phase in embracing voluntary simplicity as a practice (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). This dissertation is the first to make the connection between local shopping and purposeful consumption.

Specific to the values of socially conscious consumers and voluntary simplifiers, past studies indicate that women tend to hold more socially conscious values (e.g., Huneke, 2005; La Roche, Bergeron, & Barbaro-Forleo, 2001; Mainieri, Barnett, Valdero, Unipan, & Oskamp, 1997) and that their retail purchases demonstrate more community-based loyalty (Noble, Griffith, & Adjei, 2006). However, the findings of this study suggest that gender is not a definitive gauge for socially conscious consumption. Instead it was found that both males and females consciously consider how local shopping practices can benefit the community and the downtown overall.

Purposeful Living

Although consuming less is one way that participants have sought to simplify their lives, another commonality participants share with voluntary simplifiers is that of striving to live more purposeful lives. The literature on voluntary simplicity indicates that individuals who espouse this lifestyle not only share an interest in cutting back on consumption, but also in living more purposefully (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002). As an example, the following excerpt from Janet's experiences about the frequency of which she shopped when she was younger, and how she feels about it now, reveals the changes she has made to her practices:

J: Earlier in life when I made a lot more money I had a good job, basically I remember looking for something to buy, I was like I have all this extra money and I was like...I couldn't find anything to buy because I'd really bought everything I wanted already and it was a very empty weird feeling, it sound really ridiculous, there was nothing fun about shopping, now it's fun, it's fun to do it on occasion or to like go out to dinner once a month or twice a month versus every other day.

Similarly, Rachel, who shops locally, expressed her mindfulness about consumption and that she chooses to carefully consider what she spends her money on. She explained, "I want to make sure that the things I spend money on are actually important to me and most of the times that's not like...*stuff*." The premise of spending money in a very conscious way reflects a shared desire for balance in participants' lives, including more time for hobbies and non-materialistic pursuits, supporting much of what the literature on voluntary simplicity suggests (Ballantine & Creery, 2010; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; 2010; Shaw & Newholm, 2002).

When examined relative to the stages of practice theory, participants' principles about purposeful living are revealed in the deliberate attention they give to their consumption behaviors. They are engaging with their beliefs (understanding), at times by shopping less (procedural), and by making certain that when they do shop, it is meaningful to them (engagement). At the same time, participants' practices add another dimension to the literature on socially conscious consumption and voluntary simplicity, specifically that consumption and purposeful living can be coexisting practices. The next section illustrates one way that these practices can function together.

Focusing on Value

Alongside cutting back on overall consumption and attempting to live more purposefully, participants also articulated their socially conscious consumption behaviors through the practice of valuing what they do buy. Studies on voluntary simplifiers indicate that these consumers emphasize perceived value and quality of items purchased over quantity (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Ballantine & Creery, 2010). Many of the participants in this study share this value with respect to their purchases. Annalisa, a participant who owns a store, talked about her shopping habits and how she considers the value of items she purchases.

A: As a consumer, for probably the past 10 years when I walk into small businesses and small stores I want to know that not only am I supporting the shop owner and their endeavors, but the artist and their endeavors. Knowing how much work goes into some of these products and knowing that a lot of times it's just one artist in their own studio, not in a factory...it's that personal connection, knowing, that I'm supporting at least one, if not more parties in buying there.

The idea that a product is more valuable because of its history, or the personal work that went into crafting it, or even the connection between the store it was purchased from and the community are all important to participants' local shopping practices.

For Alex, the practice of local shopping actually alters the value he attributes to a purchase. He shared, "I think when I spend money in local places I feel like I'm contributing, when I spend money in a mall though...I feel like I'm just another consumer blowing money...it's a deeper connection to the place I'm buying it from I guess." Alex takes into consideration the quality, craftsmanship, and local relationships that are linked to the products he buys. As the interpretation of data for this study reveals, buying items from local makers and local retailers can actually alter the perceived value of the item, in that the shopper considers the time and effort that went into the item, and in turn, its value increases through the recognition that the purchase will benefit the maker, the seller, or both.

Living with less, purposeful living, and valuing the purchase of an item because of its origin are all practices related to local shopping that emerged in the data. In relation to the research questions, broadly, the concept of local shopping serves as one way for participants to engage in socially conscious consumption practices. Likewise, considering place in a broad context, for example, community-wide, the benefits of these socially conscious practices can have wide-reaching effects. Each of the sub-themes connects to the literature on socially conscious consumption and voluntary simplicity, yet adds another layer of complexity than exists in current research. Specific to the conceptual framework for this dissertation, people engage in socially conscious

consumption behaviors (practices) because they provide a means to demonstrate their overall values and goals with respect to shopping. These practices are empowering to participants and reveal civic engagement in the ways that they support the community and the people within it, such as the artisans, makers, and sellers of what they buy. The results of their engagement with these practices help to sustain local businesses, all of which positively impacts downtown revitalization. In the next section, some of the interpersonal reasons that participants engage in local shopping practices are explored.

Relational Facets

Shopping locally is a practice that offers participants a way to engage civically, and to stop and consider the reasons for their consumption practices. Based on the findings of this dissertation, it is also a means of connecting with others and with the community. Two facets emerged as particularly important to participants on the topic of the relational opportunities afforded by shopping local: (1) *Personal Attention* and (2) *Social Embeddedness*. Both are discussed in this section.

Personal Attention

Participants often expressed interpersonal goals in regards to their shopping practices. Likewise, it is posited that socially conscious consumers often seek out a social connection with the individuals who are selling the products (Atkinson, 2012). The added attention from store owners, and specifically the personalized service they provide, makes local shopping more meaningful to participants. For example, Lisa is one participant who shops locally and shared what she perceives to be a more personal kind of customer service due to the local store owner, stating “It’s personal service, because

they are local and because they are interested in you...they care if you become a regular customer...” Lisa’s experience highlights the idea that she is willing to exert the effort required by the practice of going downtown to shop locally because of the attention she receives from store owners. This is an example of how local shopping is a practice that is motivated by a connection to people. Similarly, Michelle talked about why she feels it is easier to connect with local business owners than employees in chain stores, saying,

M: You know, I am sure the workers at Walmart or wherever, I am sure they are lovely people but you don't really establish a relationship with a place that is that big ... You just don't do it. It feels like, *get them in and get them out*, it's about speed, it's not about quality of service and what you get in a local business is quality of service...and I just don't think you get that in the big box stores and the shopping malls or whatever... I mean there are 200 people working in Walmart...

Participants talked about experiencing greater levels of service in locally-owned stores as a part of establishing more personal connections with the business owners and employees. For instance, Sadie commented that there are more “personal connections” when she shops locally, and Rachel thinks that the personal connection she finds with local stores is not limited to personal service or personal relationships, but that it is also rooted in a personal connection with the place, stating,

R: I want to have an experience where I'm actually talking to people who know what they're selling. I'm tired of the places with all of the big stores that literally could be anywhere in the whole world [laughs] you know... nothing is personal there.

While the interpretation of the data support studies suggesting that local business owners are more invested in the community and therefore their customers (Tolbert et al.,

2002), this dissertation adds to the literature by demonstrating that an inverse relationship also exists, whereby shoppers are more invested in locally-owned stores because they are rewarded with the personal connections they experience during their shopping experiences. For participants, local shopping increases the chances of developing interpersonal relationships with business owners and employees of the locally-owned stores. Because shoppers have created relationships with store owners and feel that they receive more personalized attention and service, they seek to support them through their local shopping practices. Thus, the decision to shop locally is based on relationships that help them to feel good about their consumption choices. Clearly, personal attention and social connection is important to these shoppers. The implications of these decisions for the community are explored in the next section.

Social Embeddedness

Responsible capitalism proposes that businesses should be run as part of society, rather than separate from it (Keys, Malnight, & Stoklund, 2013). This idea suggests that a business is actually embedded within the community rather than independent from it. Likewise, participants in this study want to know where their money is going, and believe that local sellers are rooted in the community and have the community's best interest in mind. Local shopping means investing in businesses that will benefit the community, and more specifically, help to maintain the vitality of the downtown area. Paul explained that his motives for shopping locally relate to the broader community, stating "The money stays in the community longer and to a larger dollar figure." Jolene stated, "The benefit is to the community, not so much to the customer. It's always better to leave the

money in the community...that's best for everyone." Talia shared this view, saying, "My dollars are being reinvested into my community, which makes a big difference for our local economy." Michelle provided a very clear example of how local shopping practices can be motivated by commitment to local businesses who are rooted in the community. Michelle shops locally and has mobility limitations. She highlights her commitment to supporting neighbors when she shared her experience, saying,

M: If I can get there yes...I want to support them...I feel it is worth doing it and going there and taking the time...worth the aggravation, because in the end it was a good thing for the people who owned the store, and the workers, and for the community. So it was worth the effort, it still is, but it is more difficult now for me.

Findings of this study reveal the extent to which the practice of local shopping connects shoppers to locally-owned stores through the benefits they offer the local community. Those who shop locally think that the practices of locally-owned businesses make them more embedded within the local community. That is, shopping local is more meaningful than shopping at chain stores because participants think that their support is going to a business and an owner that is committed to the community. As a result, participants' use their shopping practices to contribute to downtown revitalization by benefitting the lives of local people and the broader community.

Participants in this study shop locally because it is empowering and provides an opportunity for them to make a difference in the community and the downtown area by being civically engaged. Moreover, it exemplifies their socially conscious consumption beliefs in that they can consume meaningfully and engage in shopping in ways that align

with their consumption values. Finally, local shopping is distinctive because it builds relationships, in as much as shoppers feel acknowledged and connected to local store owners and employees. Shoppers view the business practices of local store owners as beneficial to the community and therefore are motivated to support them.

Why Shop Locally?

In this section of the chapter, “Valuing the Local,” the meanings that local shopping have for participants as shoppers and store owners were explored. This explanation helps to address the guiding research questions of what shopping local means for consumers and what makes shopping locally in the downtown area distinctive for them. The interconnections between place and people are fundamental to understanding the meanings that emerged and are illustrated in Figure 16. Presented by a two-way arrow, specific to place, findings that occupy the left side of the arrow are discussed in terms of the local businesses that are supported and that local shopping is valued because of the uniqueness of the downtown area, the stores located there, and the overall experiences shoppers have downtown. Similarly, participants view the differentiated experience as better, in terms of providing higher quality products and service. Moreover, participants link local shopping to the place in economic ways and think that shopping locally directly supports the place (local stores and the downtown). The right side of the arrow includes findings that relate to people and focus on what local shopping means for them. Findings reveal that participants who shop locally care deeply about their communities and the people within them, they are civically-engaged, and hold the

belief that shopping locally can positively impact others. Moreover, participants' general consumption values reveal that they choose to live and consume purposefully.

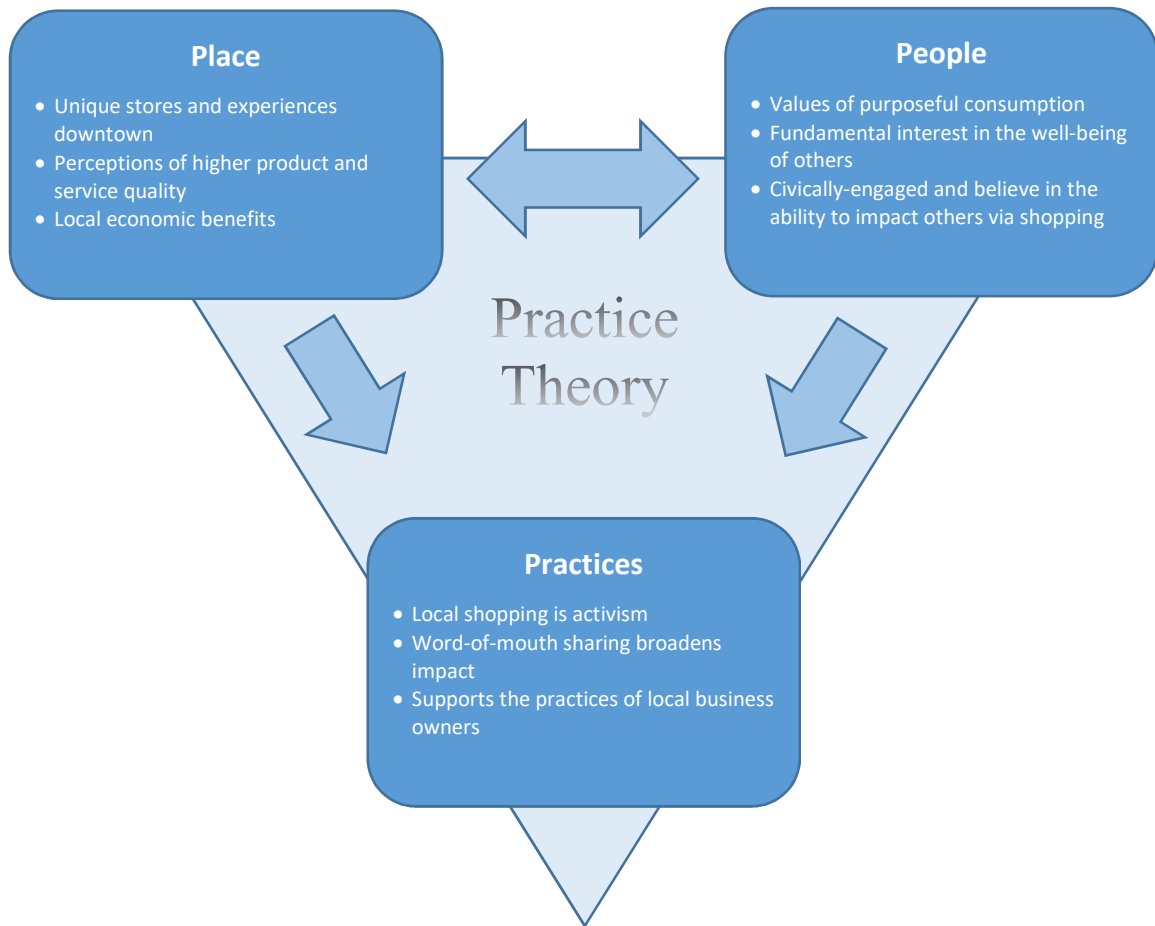


Figure 16. Conceptual Framework: Why Shop Locally

Although the interrelationships between place and people are fundamental to understanding why people shop locally, findings that connect people and place to practices also help to answer these questions. What local shopping means to participants influences their practices. For example, as a practice, local shopping is viewed as activism. Findings suggest that participants are demonstrating support for the practices

of local business owners by shopping local. Moreover, participants think that they can broaden the impact of their local shopping practices through the practice of sharing their experiences with others. How the three conceptual areas of place, people and practices relate to one another in the context of shopping local and the revitalized downtown also requires consideration of local business ownership. In the next section, the ways that local retail business owners within the downtown help to build community and foster revitalization are presented.

Owning the Opportunity

The second objective of this study was to explore the experiences of local business owners who have established shops in the downtown area. The two guiding research questions that were developed to address this objective are: (1) *Why are local retail store owners drawn to the downtown area?* and, (2) *In what ways do store owners help build community within the downtown?* These questions are used to situate the discussion of how the data relate to the three substantive areas of *People*, *Place*, and *Practices* through the literature as presented in Chapter II, as well as the conceptual model used to guide the study. The following discussion of the meanings of and experiences with local business ownership practices are framed by practice theory and presented in four sections: (a) *Civically Engaged*, (b) *Committed to the Cause*, (c) *A Community of Retailers*, and (d) *Why Open a Retail Store Downtown?*

Civically Engaged

According to Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson, and Nucci (2002), civic engagement is often inherent to a locally-owned business. The authors suggest that alongside fostering social

and economic development, community and civic welfare can be nurtured through a local business. Moreover, when considering local business ownership through the lens of practice theory, owning a store is more than simply operating a retail business. Rather, it is a practice that helps to build community. The interpretation of data reveals that participants' desire to contribute to the community extends beyond simply fostering social ties, but is a conscious goal of the practices engaged in by the business owners in this study. For example, Greg talked about his initiatives to get involved,

G: We got involved with the local community, the South end, the residents and merchants here, a nonprofit to promote the area and got involved with DCI board too....We came to be invested in the area... at the time this area was just starting to redevelop....This area was not yet a popular area, but it worked, it was what we could afford and not high traffic, but showed promise that the neighborhood could develop, so we thought we'd take a chance on it.

Although Greg's financial situation dictated the locations he could consider for establishing his business, he still took the initiative to get involved in revitalization efforts in the area. Joining local associations, and even sitting on the board of a local non-profit in order to be immersed in what was happening within the downtown community were practices he engaged in early on. A second decisive choice that Greg has since made that highlights his focus on community as a whole,, is the choice to leave the neighborhood, even though it is thriving now, because it no longer fits the brewery's desired definition of community.

A dedication to community rather than just profit provides a different dimension to Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson, and Nucci's (2002) description of how civic engagement and local business ownership may be related. The authors indicate that local businesses foster

economic and social welfare, but for Greg, the thriving neighborhood actually decreased the sense of community he once experienced. His actions highlight the importance he places on being civically engaged in the community, in that once the community connection diminished, he actually sought to move locations and plans to get involved in his new neighborhood. In relation to the conceptual framework developed for this dissertation, Greg's experience demonstrates how the relationships between people, place, and practices are not fixed and may actually change. Initially, Greg was committed to both the place in the form of the downtown area, and the practice of being a civically-engaged local business owner, but as a result of the changes downtown, he is choosing to practice being a civically-engaged local business owner by moving out of the current downtown location.

Although some business owners demonstrate their civic engagement through participation in formal activities and organizations, as Greg does, other business owners build community by establishing social links. Civic engagement includes a wide range of activities that serve to strengthen the social fabric of the community (Diller, 2001). Interpretation of data collected for this dissertation suggests that local business ownership involves specific practices that serve to achieve the same goal. For example, John talked about the way he invests in the community by building relationships through his art gallery.

J: This gallery experience has been great for me because I have been able to connect with....For me this is all about relationships and there is no business that I can think of that it is better than an art gallery because you are developing relationships with...artist relationships, with clients, relationships with friends...and people who love to come in and just soak up the atmosphere.

John describes his gallery as more than a place to sell artwork, but rather as a place to build relationships. Reflected through practice theory, this concept is useful in shedding light on how John's motivations to own and operate a business are not focused solely on the financial outcomes. Instead, his practice of business ownership intentionally focuses on people, and building relationships with them through his gallery so that others in the community can immerse themselves in art.

The present study found that building relationships and advocating for the community are two ways local business ownership offers a mechanism for civic engagement. Such findings extend Oldenburg's (1989) concept of "third places." As discussed earlier, a third place is a place besides home or work where friendships develop, or where social engagement and informal conversations take place. Breweries, bookstores, and coffeeshops are locations that Oldenburg (1989) suggests are typically third places. Greg and Samantha consciously positioned their business as a third place,

S: We want to be a community gathering place, we strive to do that, so we get a lot of groups coming in on a regular basis.... Community is the whole reason we wanted to be downtown, our history, Marshall's, the meaning...it's about community.

Indeed, while it may seem natural that a brewery is situated as a *third place*, this study reveals the variety of other types of locally-owned retail businesses that function similarly. Abigail describes her yarn store and her vision, intentionally creating a place that connects people through the type of business she operates:

A: I want to help be part of the welcoming committee, a haven for folks who are already living here and want advice or just a quiet place to come and be

inspired...that sense of community is what I'm after. You want to hang out with and get to know people who feel the same way you do about a certain subject whether it's religion or volunteering or your crafting and something creative. You want to connect with people that way and this place can be that for people.

Local businesses like Abigail's clearly act as third places. Abigail makes a difference in the civic life of her community through her business ownership practice more generally, and specifically through her commitment to the way she runs a retail store where people can come together and connect.

In sum, although participants revealed a range of ways that local business ownership builds community, and specifically in the downtown, their practices demonstrate commitment to civic engagement and this commitment emerged as a foundation for their motives. The concept of being civically engaged as a business owner is a practice that is highlighted in the ways that these participants make the choice to create certain types of places. As a result, new dimensions that connect local business ownership, civic engagement, and third places are revealed through this study. In addition to serving as a mechanism for civic engagement, further motivations for local business ownership practices also emerged in the theoretical interpretation and are discussed in the next section.

Committed to the Cause

The results of this dissertation reveal that business owners can be committed to causes beyond monetary pursuits and demonstrate a commitment to their craft or areas of expertise that supersedes financial gains. Participants that own businesses indicated a strong interest in the community, which in some ways reflects values held by socially

conscious consumers and voluntary simplifiers (Huneke, 2005). Interestingly, the literature on socially conscious consumers and voluntary simplifiers indicates that such individuals often place great importance on achieving equilibrium in life, sometimes by pursuing careers that are less financially rewarding in order to do so (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002; Shaw & Newholm, 2002). In fact, the participants who own businesses place a great deal of importance on achieving this balance. As a result, this study reveals new insights into how local business owners share the values of socially conscious consumers and voluntary simplifiers, while focusing on civic engagement and responsible capitalism. Two sub-themes are used to explain these ideas: (a) *Committed to the Calling* and (b) *Committed to Customers*.

Committed to the Calling

Local business owners participating in this study exhibit a strong commitment to their particular occupation, or what could really be described as a calling. This commitment surfaced during discussions about why each started or purchased the businesses he or she owns. Relationships described in this section suggest a central connection between people and practices as a motivation for local business ownership. For example, Bradley shared a deep-seated commitment to his calling, saying,

B: You do this business out of...this is out of some love that is not monetary. For me, books are deeply ingrained in my DNA, I don't regret it, but it's a lot of work. You're at it all the time and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Bradley's commitment to owning and operating a local bookstore reveals both a deep love for bookselling, and an acknowledgment of the lack of financial benefit it affords

him. John's experience as the owner of a local art gallery is another example that illustrates a commitment, in his case to art rather than just financial gain. He offered the following reason for gallery ownership, saying, "I love what I do, it's *about* art, not about *selling* art... I don't really care about accumulating funds, I don't really accumulate funds." Indeed, John explained that, "I haven't been showing a profit at all. I haven't been paying myself.... I take what I need and no more." John's practice of gallery ownership is clearly motivated by his commitment to enhancing the lives of others by sharing art with them. He finds his balance through this self-imposed responsibility, and commitment to something greater than just profit.

Another example that reveals the commitment that local business owners in this study have to their calling and how this commitment provides the balance they are seeking in life is detailed in Annalisa's explanation of what inspired her to open her boutique, which sells a mix of vintage and artisan pieces. Annalisa explained, "I love old things. They each have a story to tell and each piece is unique, so that is how I kind of started down this path with retail." She explains that her business is bred out of a love for what she sells, rather than expectations of prosperity. Bradley summed up the commitment that emerged from local downtown business owners in this study by saying, "This [downtown] strip is largely populated by people doing things intrinsic to them, it feels really quite good that way."

Each of these examples show how the business owners participating in this study are committed to what they do to the point that they own businesses in order to share them with others in the community. The key difference that distinguishes their particular

experiences is what they offer in their spaces (e.g., books, yarn, etc.). Local business ownership is one way that these participants build community while also finding equilibrium in life. This study is the first to articulate that the dedication that local business owners have to their practice of local business ownership and to the community can be linked to voluntary simplicity. That is, considered through practice theory, these participants have not just considered a career pursuing what they enjoy. Rather, they have actualized the practice and are fully engaged in it. They have deliberately pursued the calling, rather than potentially more lucrative avenues, reflecting the significance they place on local business ownership in terms of its ability to benefit other people. In the next section, the commitment that local business owners demonstrate to their customers is discussed.

Committed to Customers

A strong commitment to customers helps to explain the interrelationships between people and practices that emerged in the interpretation. Local business owners build community through their commitment to customers in a range of ways. Abigail is a local business owner who took on the practice of owning a business for the sake of benefitting others. Abigail shared, “The store was going to close if I didn’t buy it.” She went on to explain how she discussed the situation with her significant other and acknowledged that it would mean seeing much less of him but, as she said,

A: It’s worth it I think, to have a place that is still accessible for people who have questions or want to learn more about different kinds of crafts that some of the big box stores don’t offer. They have supplies but they don’t have the know-how, so when people read the directions and can’t figure out what they did wrong, if they go back to the store they’ll find employees who are like...*I don’t know, I don’t*

know how to do any of this...I mean, you might find someone who was actually hired because they know the craft, but in the long run there is nothing quite like being able to sit down with someone over your shoulder and say...Now what we do is...

Clearly, Abigail was motivated to buy the store out a concern for her customers, namely, ensuring that they would not lose the type of service and knowledge they had grown accustomed to by shopping in that store. This motivation, can, in part, be explained by practice theory, in that, as Warde (2005) describes, consumption provides some type of reward, often both internally and externally. In this case, the internal reward of knowing that she has helped others served as motivation to buy the store. Abigail's experience clearly illustrates this tenet of practice theory, as her practice of store ownership is a result of a deliberate decision she made to buy the store acknowledging she is sacrificing time with her partner to keep it running.

Sabine is another local business owner motivated by her commitment to customers. Sabine feels that her role is one of both a customer of local artisans and a liaison, of sorts, connecting her customers to local artists. She explained,

S: I love working with artisans and seeing the creativity.... They explore the creative process and the new mediums they're working in....And here, meeting the customers too, that's always been a really rewarding part, getting to know them and knowing that they appreciate the artisans I am bringing into the store.

The commitment Sabine has to her customers reflects her interest in supporting artisans and showcasing their merchandise in her boutique. By doing this, she is able to broaden their reach and connect them with the customers who visit her store. Sabine's support of

artisans and customers was further revealed when talking about the disappointing results of recent First Friday events, and how she values the time of these artisans. Sabine stated, “I felt bad asking artisans to come because I felt like they weren't going to be profitable, they were selling one or two, pieces and it used to be slammed in here.” Her commitment to her vendors (people) is evident in the fact that she stopped hosting these events (a practice) because of her concern for their profitability, rather than focusing on what they could do for her store (place). Although Sabine fills her store with local goods and promotes local artisans, her primary commitment is to the people, her vendors, suggesting that her practice of local business ownership is largely motivated by a connection to people. According to practice theory, change occurs through the relationships that are developed (Ortner, 2006). This is illustrative of one of the key points of practice theory, in that Sabine made a point to focus on her relationships with the artisans, spotlighting their work and valuing their time rather than her needs as a business owner when making this decision, thus enabling her to maintain positive relationships with her vendors.

One example that demonstrates a robust interrelationship between the concepts of place and practices is revealed in the way that Margaret talked about her pricing strategy. She detailed,

M: We sell things on eBay too...I'll post things and sell them there. I try to give people here a fair chance first. Usually after a few weeks I'll put things on eBay...I'll have it for \$45 in the store and then eventually put it on eBay for \$85 and sell it.

Not only does Margaret offer her local customers the opportunity to buy items in her store first, but by waiting several weeks to post them online, she also offers them at a substantial discount in her store versus online. The connections Margaret has with her local customers demonstrates an ownership perspective based on the idea of responsible capitalism, as she focuses on the needs of customers in her community as much as her own (Keys, Malnight, & Stoklunkd, 2013). The passage below reinforces this mindset, as Margaret continues,

M: Sometimes I do feel bad if I've bought something too low and made way too much money on it....This guy brought me this amp, an amplifier, it was really cool, the knobs and stuff, it was something from the 60s, it was cool colors, he wanted \$100 for it. I said *Well...I don't know, I just don't know anything about it. I said I'd give him \$60*, I know I could get \$60 for it just because it's really unusual and interesting looking. So I ended up selling it for \$600. I ended up looking online and did some research and even found a guy who said if I fixed it up it would be worth \$3000. But then I felt bad. I could have given him more....If that guy comes in ever again I will give him more money.

Participants' ownership practices do not focus just on the financial benefits of the business. Instead they center on benefitting others, whether it is ensuring a store remains open, or that local customers pay less than online ones. Each sees his or her business as part of the community, rather than separate from it. This mindset on the part of local business owners is reflective of responsible capitalism.

Commitments to the cause emerged through a calling to business ownership and through a sense of responsibility to the broader community and customers. These are two ways that participants demonstrate how local business ownership practices can build community (people), and in turn, benefit the downtown (place). This study is the first to

consider local business ownership as a means of achieving the equilibrium that socially conscious consumers and voluntary simplifiers seek. Additionally, this study extends thought on the ways civic engagement and responsible capitalism are linked via the motivations of local business owners. Interestingly, among the participants, a focus on the community as a whole also includes fostering relationships with other local business owners, which is explained next.

A Community of Retailers

The interpretation of data revealed that local business ownership can be communal rather than competitive. As discussed, local business owners share an interest in the overall civic welfare of the area and are invested in it. Yet this study offers an additional dimension to this understanding by revealing that a camaraderie can exist among local business owners. To address this finding in more depth, two sub-themes are explained in this section: (1) *We're All in the Same Boat* and (2) *A Shared Revitalization*.

We're All in the Same Boat

One of the most interesting findings to emerge from the thematic interpretation is that local business owners build community not only with customers, but seek to be a community among each other. In fact, a very strong sense of camaraderie actually exists among the local business owners participating in this study. Bradley stated, "There's a real sense of *We're all in it together... I want all of these places to do well*," that is, the practice of owning a store can actually help neighboring businesses to be successful. Bradley's sentiment was echoed by other local business owners and in different ways.

For example, Abigail, who owns a business across the street from Bradley, described how a common interaction with visitors in her store might go:

A: I'm like...*Do you want a map of downtown?* I tell them about the distillery, and I tell them about the Civil Rights museum, and I tell them about the different places to eat while they're waiting, and most are really grateful and excited to just see some of the local color downtown. I try to contribute and help people find what they need, even if I'm not it.

The concept of civic engagement combined with practice theory helps to explain Abigail's motivations to contribute to the whole of the community. In particular, she regularly directs customers to other local businesses, even if she does not personally profit from it, in order to introduce them to all that the downtown area offers.

Annalisa, a participant who recently started a boutique in the downtown area also experiences this sense of camaraderie. It was particularly important when she was making plans to open her business and was talking with other store owners. She shared,

A: I sat down with another business owner Liam, and asked him what it was like being a business owner down here and he told me that I'm getting in at the right time...he said *I've watched my business grow a little bit each year*...he gave me numbers, and he gave me the confidence to know that things are moving in the right direction here.

Annalisa gained the confidence to open the boutique because of the information shared by Liam, and because of his support. Instead of acting like a competitor, he acted like a colleague. She went on to explain how the information he gave her solidified her decision to open the store, and specifically downtown, saying,

A: That was a big part of knowing specifically I wanted to open in Claremont and in downtown, having worked in retail for so long, so many of the...Kylie at Design Times, Sabine at All Good Things, Ginny at Lucid...I already knew a lot of people who were down here and spent some time talking with them. They were incredibly helpful.

These examples provide evidence for the existence of an informal network, suggesting that a community with an interest in the success of the entire downtown can actually be developed through local retail businesses. Relationships among retailers, as a community in and of itself, were described by Katherine, the manager of a local coffee shop, when she said,

K: One thing I've noticed is that the business owners who frequent each other's [businesses]...Christy from Cantina, and her mother Rhoda, [they] come in here all the time, we go over there, so we have that connection...and develop those relationships, that's where you start to see some of the fruit, you know not just that *There's a place up the street*, but that you really *know* them. One of the bartenders from the Gray Goat, he's a regular, Chad Kelty, the tattoo shops. It's people, it's not just the owners it's the people who work in the locations. All the girls who work in Design Times come over here.

Katherine points to how camaraderie forged by patronizing one another's businesses in the downtown actually leads to positive change, and in this case, facilitating revitalizing the downtown area. This finding supports the use of practice theory in helping to explain how local retail store owners build community, illustrating that change occurs through the relationships that are developed (Ortner, 2006), in this case, relationships among local business owners.

An overwhelming sentiment emerging in this study is that local business owners in the downtown area attempt to engage in practices that support one another because

they see how it benefits the entire downtown. Margaret's remark about building community through local business ownership suggests as much,

M: If we can convince other businesses to come down here and open a store...Sometimes I feel like this is just a community service. I have to be here, I have to be open, so people can come down here and have fun and get excited.

Margaret's comment reflects the sense of civic duty she feels to local shoppers and to local business owners. She even calls it "community service," which demonstrates an understanding of how her business is truly part of the community rather than separate from it, and, in a sense, she is practicing responsible capitalism by doing so.

Overall, the experiences shared by local business owners participating in this study demonstrate support for the link between civic engagement (Adler & Goggin, 2005), locally-owned businesses (Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson, & Nucci, 2002), and responsible capitalism (Keys, Malnight, & Stoklund, 2013) and add dimension to these literatures by revealing the camaraderie that develops among local retail business owners. In each of the examples, participants see themselves as linked to the local downtown area and to other business owners within it, which demonstrates their concern for the success of other people. On the whole, employing practice theory to explain the motivations of local business owners reveals how relationships built among local businesses owners has resulted in a shared practice of working together for the benefit of all retailers and for the greater downtown area. What this shared interest means for revitalization is discussed in more detail in the next section.

A Shared Revitalization Vision

An important finding of this study is that there exists a communal vision of what a downtown area can become. In turn, this study highlights the extent to which the practice of a shared vision for the area is an integral component of revitalization. To put it another way, the practices shape the place, but the practices are determined by people. For example, Katherine revealed her thoughts on how a shared vision for downtown revitalization has driven the actions of some of the local business owners. She stated,

K: I think the owners had a vision of revitalization, The Coffee Bean, Groove and I believe Design Times...the glass shop that was across the street. The Coffee Bean and Groove really led the way, Shannon, the previous owner before Dave, used to be on Main street, she had the vision and opened around the same time...I think places like that and then Tanner's contributed to the revitalization....There's a mutual respect of having a common vision of wanting to create the awesome place that we all know Claremont can be and we all want to do what we can. I think we share that and keep that more in focus.

This finding is important because revitalization trends are prompting retail development in once vacant areas (Cohen, 2007) and younger generations are seeking out these areas to work and live (Loyer, 2015). Thus, this finding is significant for cities that are seeking to revitalize and attract younger individuals. Annalisa, who is of the Millennial generation and wants to attract others her age to her store and to the downtown area, suggested that a vision of revitalization can be attributed to a number of different business and people within the community, saying,

A: The restaurants on this end, Table 10, Anywhere, breweries, Knoll Hill...is a huge part of why this end is changing and now DCI being on that corner and having a street front presence and campaigning for that end of Oak street is huge. My landlord Adam Miller, because of the properties he owns on this end, HQ

Claremont, it's a big thing with Millennials, the freestanding office spaces and being able to rent out something to prop up your laptop or hold a meeting, all of those things contribute to why this end is changing.

Annalisa went on to talk about how she thinks that the differences between Millennials and previous generations is key to having a shared vision for the area. She suggested that Millennials are open to change and are changing the way they work and live, while older generations are less inclined to do so. Moreover, she indicated that businesses that provide the amenities younger cohorts seek have emerged downtown and are finding success. Meanwhile, businesses that are not open to changing are experiencing difficulties, and some are even closing. She explained,

A: I also know some who have been there forever, and some are closing and some are trying to determine how to shift to accommodate the changes that are occurring, but because of that it is really shifting the way that business is happening down at that end. And what has always worked, maybe isn't working anymore, so determining that you can't stay stagnant especially when the area is changing so much. I've spoken with some who have been there forever and [are] willing to change and some who have their heels dug into the ground and want to just continue doing what they've always done---but they're seeing what happens to fellow businesses who haven't changed, and some are moving on.

It is apparent from the conversations that businesses which lack the vision for revitalization of the area are not as successful as those who embrace it.

This study provides evidence that a shared vision is an important practice for downtown revitalization. A key aspect of this vision is a broad range of types of businesses and store offerings. To this point, the desire for more retail within the downtown area was shared by the business owners participating in this study. For

example, a vision for a more livable downtown is something that Bradley talked about. He said, “It’s got to be more than just nightlife, [the downtown area] needs a good hardware store, things for peoples’ everyday lives...retail, clothing, I don't think we need more bars. People living downtown would be amazing.” Bradley’s perspective indicates a more long-term vision, in that he wants it to thrive in ways beyond the well-being of just his own business. Likewise, Sabine commented, “There's never been a ton of retail down here, it's eating and restaurants.... I'd like to see more retail downtown.” Or as Margaret, another retail store owner in the downtown shared, “So many of these buildings are turning into bars and nightclubs, that must be where the money is...[it is] easier than retail, but I don't have control over that, so [it would be good] if we can convince other businesses to come down here and open a store...” Margaret sees a need for more retail offerings within the downtown in order for the area to be successful. Interestingly, more retail means more competition, yet that does not seem to be a concern for participants.

This study is among the first to explore revitalization from the perspective of local retail store owners. Findings point to the ways that local retail stores and their owners are connected to the revitalization of the place through practices stemming from a shared vision and their commitments to customers as well as their craft. Thus, this study helps to broaden what is known about downtown revitalization and move the focus beyond the concrete dimensions that the urban planning literature typically centers on when exploring downtown revitalization. Practice theory is useful in explaining the foresight and actions of local business owners who practice camaraderie instead of competition

because they are committed to the downtown and they see the benefits that added retail would bring to revitalization. These findings are illustrative of the core ideas of practice theory, in that local business ownership practices emerged as a calling or commitment to craft that was realized or achieved in the form of a retail business and has developed to encompass a commitment to customers and the wider community, including other retailers, as parts within the whole of the revitalized downtown.

In this section, the ways local business owners build community was discussed in relation to the literature. Findings specific to owning the opportunity reveal that local business ownership is a way to build community through motivations to be civically engaged with the community, and to advocate for revitalization. Through these practices they are creating connections and establishing places where the community can gather. The findings from this dissertation reveal that the practice of local business ownership provides an opportunity to demonstrate commitment to something beyond monetary pursuits of a profession, including one's area of expertise. Another important finding is that local business ownership practices build community via informal networks among business owners. Not only is the network of community important, but a shared vision among local business owners was found to facilitate revitalization efforts as well. Findings contribute to the literature, as no study has yet to investigate the ways that local business owners build community within a downtown. In the next section, the ways that the conceptual areas of place, people, and practices are interconnected is discussed.

Why Open a Retail Store Downtown?

Findings related to Owning the Opportunity illustrate the interrelationships between the conceptual areas of place, people, and practices and were described in this section. These accounts help to explain the guiding research questions that center on why local retail store owners are drawn to the area, and in what ways do store owners help build community within the downtown. The interrelationships between place, people and practices that are fundamental to understanding why participants own local businesses are illustrated in Figure 17. Findings reveal that local business owners are often motivated by a strong sense of civic engagement and reflect viewpoints that align with socially conscious consumers and voluntary simplicity through their commitments to the community and through their chosen careers that focus on balance in life rather than profit. Specific to place, local business owners establish stores in the downtown because they desire not only to run a store but to create a specific type of place for their customers. Findings highlight that they share a vision for what the downtown area can be. Moreover, participants who own local businesses reveal their commitment to the downtown through their devotion to people who shop locally. Findings illustrate the extent to which local business owners are civically-engaged and committed to what they do along with where they do it (downtown).



Figure 17. Conceptual Framework: Why Local Store Ownership

Because local business owners are connected to the downtown, are civically-engaged, and are committed to their calling, they engage in practices that build community. For example, they participate on local committees to promote the area. Similarly, they engage in informal practices, such as collaborating with other local business owners, which in turn, builds community through a sense camaraderie rather than competition. Likewise, findings reveal that local business owners engage in practices that build community with customers through their business ownership

practices, centering on the people over profit. How the phenomenon of local shopping serves to support downtown revitalization is discussed in the next section.

Shopping for Revitalization

A third objective of this study was to explore the relationship between shopping locally and downtown revitalization. To this end, the research questions addressed in this section of the chapter are, (1) *What makes shopping locally in the downtown area distinctive for consumers?* and, (2) *What is the appeal of a downtown area for local retail store owners?* These questions structure the discussion of the thematic interpretation of data collected for this dissertation relative to the literature presented in Chapter II as well as the conceptual model linking people, place, and practice in this study. This section includes explanation of the meanings of local shopping and local business ownership that emerged in the interpretation and discussion of the implications of these meanings for downtown revitalization. Practice theory is used to frame explanations of the interconnections between people, place, and practice in the following four sections: (a) *Shifting Views on Shopping*, (b) *Redeveloping Retail*, (c) *High Prices and Slow Progress*, and (d) *Why is Downtown Revitalization Important?*

Shifting Views on Shopping

Throughout the interpretation of the data, one finding that emerged as key is that participants' attitudes toward shopping practices are shifting, including practices that connect people to the places they shop. In this section, findings that relate to the shifting views about shopping and what these views mean for local shopping are discussed. The sub-themes that explore the ways these changes are occurring are presented in this

section: (1) *Moving Away from Malls*, (2) *Attachment to Place*, and (3) *Connecting with Local*. Each of these areas is discussed in relation to the pertinent literature on the topic.

Moving Away from Malls

This dissertation is the first to specifically address how shopping local and the downtown combine to form a understanding of the importance of *place* as it pertains to locally-owned retail stores. Existing research on the topic of place indicates that people create bonds with physical locations, including commercial settings. This phenomenon is known as *sense of place* (Debenedetti, Oppewal, & Arsel, 2014), and downtown areas are advantageous for creating this sense of place because of the history, character, and charm they typically offer (Robertson, 1999). In contrast, malls are seen as being stark and corporate-like shopping experiences (Halebsky, 2004).

Indeed, participants in this study frequently expressed connections to place, and specifically a preference for shopping downtown rather than in other places. For example, Mary, a participant who shops locally, simply stated, “I love it. [I] prefer it to mall shopping.” Other participants, such as Kayla, described downtown shopping experiences as “More real than a prefab shopping mall or shopping center.” Similar sentiments were offered by Whitney, who talked about the atmosphere of and offerings at mall stores compared to going downtown,

W: I hardly ever go to the mall to get anything, I just don't like the mall.... They feel very outdated...the artificial lighting, being closed-in....I like to be outside and have natural light and the mall is full of chain stores, there is no reason to go there because I can find all of the same things online without leaving my house.

Cara talked about some of the visual aspects as reasons she enjoys going downtown, saying, “[there are] neat things going on...parks, art, with the murals that are coming onto empty facades of buildings...with little jean sculptures that are throughout the city. It's just a fun place to be.” The enthusiasm participants expressed for shopping downtown, and particularly in contrast to shopping malls, provides some explanation for recent reports of major retail bankruptcy filings by chain stores throughout the U.S. (Malinsky, 2017; Wattles, 2017).

Sometimes participants’ enthusiasm for local shopping focused on the physical characteristics. Sometimes it focused on the atmosphere. For instance, Michelle said, “It's a more relaxed atmosphere, and I think it is friendlier you know, heading out to a mall which you know can be very frenetic and just not pleasant I think it is more pleasant to shop downtown.” Interestingly, while some participants described the downtown shopping experience as relaxing, others highlighted the energy they think the downtown offers, as Tim described, “I like it because it is more of that city vibe all the streets and... It's electric, not New York electric, but more electric than...just your average strip mall.” Business owners also expressed that the environment downtown was the reason why they decided to set up shop downtown. Annalisa shared,

A: I always prefer to be in an outdoor setting, I like seeing sunlight and knowing what is happening outside, but the conveniences and really that community feel that comes with the walkability. You can call your friends and say *Do you want to meet for lunch, coffee...See you 15 minutes*, you can walk, there's something nice about that, it contributes to that overall vibe.

Previous research has yet to focus on the importance of downtown locations for locally-owned retail businesses. Findings of this dissertation reveal that consumer evaluations of shopping location and sense of place are significant. Participants, including both business owners and shoppers, shared their preferences for downtown locations and that an attraction to the area contributes to their practices of business ownership and local shopping.

Whether downtown shopping experiences were described as relaxing or exciting, participants' opinions about them are generally positive and tend to highlight the negatives of mall shopping. Both perspectives support the idea of a shift in shopping preferences, from malls to distinctive locales like downtown. These findings underscore the desires among some consumers for a unique shopping experience, and that they seek out such experiences when shopping in downtown locations. Through shopping locally, consumers avoid shopping malls and can take advantage of the more unique atmosphere and setting typically found downtown. This, in turn, supports the practices of local business owners downtown, contributing to the revitalization of the area. Next, the particular ways that participants described their connections to the downtown area are discussed.

Attachment to Place

Although participants revealed an overall preference for shopping downtown rather than at malls, the way that they discussed their attachment to the downtown also supports the notion that shopping trends are shifting more broadly. Findings reveal that the meaning that the revitalized downtown holds for participants who shop locally and

own local businesses is important. According to Kleine and Baker (2004), the emotional bonds people have with places, or the phenomenon of sense of place, can result from physical or social aspects of the place. How participants feel connected to places they shop offers insight into the concept of place-related attachment and is examined in the following sub-themes: (i) *Heart of the City* and (ii) *Uniqueness*.

Heart of the City. It has been established that a city's identity is very closely connected to its downtown area (Sneed, Runyan, Swinney, & Lin, 2011). However, beyond Miller's (1999) suggestion that some stores become landmarks within a city, little is known about how people assign meaning to shopping at downtown retail stores. Findings from this dissertation reveal that retail establishments within the downtown function to connect people to the area. Many participants attribute their connection to downtown specifically to the locally-owned stores there. For instance, Ralph talked about the overall value he attaches to locally-owned stores and how he feels they help to strengthen this affection for the city, saying, "Locally-owned stores give a city its culture." For other participants, it is what they purchase in the stores downtown that strengthens their connection to the place. Gloria suggested as much about a jewelry store downtown, saying, "Schafer's....I obviously don't shop there every day, but we got our wedding rings there...I can't walk by Schafer's without thinking about it." Another participant, Kayla shared that in contrast to a shopping mall "[downtown] is more real than a prefab shopping mall," suggesting that there is something more about downtown shopping. Participants have connected to the downtown through the retail stores and

their fond feelings about the area. Such responses by participants echo Robertson's (1995) statement that the downtown area is the "heart and soul" of a city.

Along with the stores and the physical features of the downtown area, social bonds forged in locally-owned retail businesses make the downtown shopping experience more distinctive for shoppers. Brocato, Baker, and Vorhees (2013) examined the social bonds customers create with employees, yet their study was specific to bars and nightclubs. In the present study, place attachment emerged as important to retail stores. Stephanie described bonds she has developed with places in the downtown area through the people who work there, saying, "Because I have gone to many of the stores and restaurants downtown for years, I know many of the owners and staff in downtown restaurants." On the flipside, participants who are employees and store owners talked about the bonds they have developed with customers. Cassandra explained,

C: I just got back from maternity leave, I've been gone for two months and for the first two weeks people were just coming in to say *Hello*, they just stop in to say *Hi* and were shocked to see me and so excited to see my son but they just stop in to say *Hi* and to see the new merchandise. It's neighborly, like we have relationships with people....People call and ask for us.

The concept of the downtown as the heart of the city emerged in terms of bonds people have with the downtown area and how these bonds make shopping locally more distinctive than shopping in other parts of the city. Practice theory can help to explain the bonds that connect participants' shopping practices to the downtown. As Zelizer (2005) posits, shopping can be more meaningful than just the act of buying something. Instead, consumers can use it to make a statement or take a stand for something. In this case,

where they are shopping means something for consumers, in that they are not simply at a mall aimlessly consuming, instead they have developed deep affection for the downtown, considering it the heart and soul of the city because of the stores and even the store owners and employees there. The significance they attach to the place supports the notion that shopping is changing from hollow consumption experiences to more meaningful and deliberate practices. This finding is significant because the nature of a locally-owned business is likely to be advantageous for creating bonds with shoppers.

Uniqueness. The interpretation of data collected for this study reveals that the sense of uniqueness afforded by local shopping experiences resonates with participants and contributes to their local shopping practices. While attachment to place is often attributed to physical spaces (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004) and the social relationships within them (Brocato, Baker, & Vorhees, 2013), the results of this dissertation connect people and place through the uniqueness of the overall shopping experience as described by participants. This is the first study that considers how the physical space, the personal relationships, and unique shopping experience come together in the concept of place attachment, and specifically attachment to place in the form of a collection of retail stores.

Although unique product selection was among the most frequently mentioned advantages of shopping at locally-owned stores, findings indicate that place attachment extends beyond the products to include the overall shopping experience. That is, participants commented on how the atmosphere in the locally-owned businesses, and the whole of the downtown area, contribute in a positive way to their shopping experiences.

For instance, Emily said, “It's a different vibe down here...the stores are different, it's not going to be something you can get anywhere.” For her, the products as well as the atmosphere in the stores are notable features along with the downtown itself. Some participants, like Jasmine, simply noted “I like the unique stores,” while others like Victoria were specific about the unique features that make the area attractive, detailing, “The outdoor component, mixed with the architecture of the buildings...[it] provides a nostalgic, refreshing, and unique experience,” suggesting that she welcomes a new and different kind of shopping experience.

Some participants described how shopping downtown actually brings back specific memories. For example, Evelyn said, “I love the old buildings, it's beautiful. The bookstore, that everything store...smells like my grandmother's basement.” The unique experience within this particular store is so strong that Evelyn, a participant who is in her 70s, connects it to the scent she remembers from her grandmother's basement.

Findings from this dissertation reveal that participants bond with the place of downtown because of the unique shopping experiences it offers. When applying practice theory to place-related attachment, the theory proves useful in explaining how the three conceptual areas of this study relate, in that shoppers make the concerted effort to go downtown to shop because of the uniqueness (understanding). By doing so (procedural), social bonds develop with people in the locally-owned stores there. These bonds result in more devoted engagement with the practice, as bonds between the place and the people deepen, culminating in thriving local retail businesses that contribute to the overall revitalization efforts of the downtown. Thus, findings reveal that not only do shoppers

bond to the place because they view it as the heart of the city and they prefer the uniqueness, but because it affords them a new and different shopping experience.

Connecting with Local

Another way that change was observed relative to shopping focuses on how people connect with the idea of local. Participants in this study bond with places through local connections to the product, the producer, and the seller. Although the literature indicates that, in general, individuals impart meaning on their consumption behaviors (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982), meanings that shoppers attach to items because they are locally-produced or purchased from a locally-owned retailer have yet to be fully examined. This dissertation is among the first to specifically consider how the idea of “local” fosters attachment to products, and, in turn, place. Participants place significant value on the local connection. Sometimes the connection is a local producer, while other times it is a local seller. For example, Kathleen stated, “I like to support local stores and artists.” In the same vein, Susan described the reason she likes to shop at locally-owned stores, saying, “[They] support and contribute to the community, plus they give you more interesting places to shop.” Craig’s motivation to shop locally is similar, saying “It’s the personal connection with store-owner...unique products, [that are] often locally made.”

The personal connection that motivates participants’ local shopping practices was sometimes described in terms of quality. As Sadie put it, “Unique or better-curated items,” result from the owners being familiar with what their customers are looking for. James also commented on what he feels he gets from purchases made by local producers

and sellers, saying “It comes with a price tag, you get quality though...” For James the connection to local goes beyond quality,

There's a guy who, in Bennington...who makes shirts out of organic, sustainable, cotton, and they're one of a kind, and picking up traction. So how cool is that to say it's North Carolina organic cotton and it's from your local farmers...like craft beers, they do it too...get stuff from local farmers....I'd rather support companies who are supporting other local people.

Obviously, James feels a sense of pride in supporting people in his local community.

Other participants sense the pride that the store owners take in their merchandise and their shops. Lisa suggested, “[It’s] better personal service, because they are local and because they are interested in you being a regular customer, and giving them a positive review. And maybe...just because they take pride in their store.”

Choosing products and stores because of the people behind them emerged as important to participants’ local shopping practices, and as one more way that shopping is shifting from a relatively inconsequential action to meaningful practice. Practices motivated by the notion of “local” connect people to small local producers and local retailers in a specific place because of feelings tied to the place, such as a sense of local pride. These shopping practices help to maintain and grow local businesses. The result that comes from this support means more local jobs are created and the overall economic well-being of the local area is improved.

Participants expressed an attachment to place, including the downtown area, as well as specific businesses within the downtown, and even within the state, in a range of ways. For some participants who shop locally, this attachment strengthens their bonds

with the city as a whole and reinforces notions about the vibrancy of its local culture. For others, the attachment is rooted in the uniqueness offered in local retail stores. Yet for others, the attachment is forged through the connection to local producers and local sellers of products.

The interpretation of data indicates that local shopping is clearly differentiated and distinctive from other shopping experiences (i.e. the mall), and points to renewed interest in downtown shopping. Shopping locally in the downtown fosters bonds between people and the retail businesses located there. Thus, place attachment becomes more than a connection between people and a place, as it offers many complexities, and in the case of this dissertation, influences practices. Some of the specific ways that the community and the downtown area benefit from the bonds created through place attachment are discussed in the next section.

Redeveloping Retail

Although practices of local shopping and local business ownership stem from a variety of motivations, the results include positive changes for the area, such as a renewed sense of vitality and focused efforts with respect to downtown revitalization. Achieving a revitalized downtown requires effort by everyone involved and in different ways. These types of effort are explained in the following sub-themes: (a) *Reasons to Go Downtown*, (b) *Events Are Essential*, and (c) *Partnerships with Purpose*.

Reasons to Go Downtown

One outcome resulting from the commitment of participants' engagement in practices of local shopping and local business ownership is that revitalization efforts in

and around the downtown area are furthered through retail, making the area more distinctive for shoppers and business owners alike. Although little research exists on the topic, Sneed, Runyan, Swinney, and Lin (2011) suggest that retail is a key factor for the success of downtown revitalization because it gives individuals a reason to visit the area. The same was found in the present study, as participants attribute the changes seen downtown to retail businesses opening in the area. Specifically, some have changed their shopping practices because there are now a variety of places to go. Janet describes her experiences of going downtown to shop, saying,

J: My office is across the tracks. You know the tracks on Oak Street, and you know that's not an area you used to go to. Back in 1990 you wouldn't dare cross those tracks...you know, sketchy people, sketchy businesses....Now you know you've got Lombardi's, Table 10, Marshall's....You know, a lot happening...umm, and I'd say even 10 years ago if you'd go downtown on a Friday night there wasn't much happening.

Janet's comment illustrates the distinct changes she has seen in the area over the years, and credits this change to the retail businesses who have taken a chance on the area. Similar to Janet's comment, Tim talked about the distinct changes he has seen in the downtown area and explains what having reasons to go downtown mean for the community:

T: I mean it used to be, you go downtown and you might see a guy walking around and everything shut down at night, and then you started seeing more and more open doors and things starting up. And a lot of the old buildings that were...I'm not sure what kind of buildings they were maybe office buildings or industrial businesses that started to turn into artisan space and event space and started seeing more shops and restaurants....I think City Cakes came in and maybe then you started seeing a bigger draw and it seems like the city started to finally focus on this whole revitalization thing.

Tim's comments illustrate that the everyday practices of local business owners, who took a chance on the area by opening up shops, restaurants, and filling vacant buildings with artisan space have given people reasons to come downtown. Tim's explanation suggests a ripple effect of revitalization. Practice theory is useful in explaining this, in that, through their engagement with downtown business ownership, their presence signals to other hopeful business owners that they can also operate in the same area. Thus, the whole of downtown benefits by creating an area with many places to go and eventually a more attractive, revitalized downtown.

Some of the participants in this study attribute the changes and revitalization they have seen within the downtown area to the practices of local business owners. A few also discussed the interest that local developers have taken in the area. Rachel suggested, "I am confident that some of the funding and developer folks have contributed to what is going on down here." Throughout the interpretation of data, it was evident that the establishment of new local businesses, as well as the financial investment in the downtown area by local people have contributed to increasing the reasons participants have for going downtown.

The people who own businesses and invest in the downtown have furthered revitalization efforts through their practices, adding strong support for the notion that retail is helping to revitalize the downtown and renew interest in the area. Although retail stores are attractive reasons to go downtown, its vitality also results from events held there. The way that events hosted by retailers help further revitalization efforts is discussed in the next section.

Events are Essential

Area events hosted by retailers emerged within the thematic interpretation as a key reason why people go downtown. That is, participants who shop locally frequently mentioned event attendance as important reasons why they decide to go downtown. For example, Shana mentioned that not only is the downtown area convenient for her shopping needs, but she frequently goes downtown “Because there’s an event or something I want to attend.”

Although previous literature has suggested that events and event spaces draw people downtown (Loyer, 2015; Robertson, 1995), the present study takes this idea one step further by providing evidence that retail store owners who take it upon themselves to host in-store events or join together with other retail store owners to create special events can help boost the vitality of the downtown. Liam, a business owner, talked about an event that local retailers hosted specifically to bring people to the South end of Oak Street, saying, “October 21st we're having a festival with a stage, and a few bands and food trucks.” Greg even talked about the great deal of time he spent “Figuring out what kind of events we need to do to draw people in here,” suggesting that it is not just the city or downtown area that host events, but that specific retail businesses also join together to host events for the purpose of drawing people downtown. Indeed, hosting events is a practice that is important to Bradley, another local business owner. As seen in Figure 18, Bradley’s bookstore hosted ten events over a one-week time period. He thinks these events will encourage people to visit his store. Moreover, the idea is that they will stay downtown, visiting other stores before and after.



Figure 18. Example of Weekly Events at Bradley's Store Posted on Facebook

The effort Bradley puts into planning and hosting events can benefit other businesses in the downtown and contribute to the overall vitality of the area. Hosting in-store events or events that span several blocks of downtown is a practice business owners engage in to help bring people to the downtown and create the vitality needed to revitalize the area. Bradley's example is particularly illustrative of the third component of practice theory, in that it demonstrates his devotion to local business ownership, surpassing what might be more typical business ownership engagement. For retail store owners, downtown events link people, place and practices, in that the practice of hosting events draws people to the area, creating a buzz about downtown and aiding in downtown revitalization by bringing the focus back to a once forgotten place. For people who shop locally, attending events downtown is a practice that, considered through practice theory,

may result from a desire to contribute to downtown revitalization, particularly, if they understand how their shopping practices support the businesses, act on this understanding, and continue to patronize the stores and events in the area through their purchases.

Although some events are planned by the city, it is evident that those hosted by individual retail businesses are also significant to the redevelopment of downtown, and one more way that this study adds to what is known about how the practices of locally-owned retail stores assist in downtown revitalization efforts. Beyond the physical changes evident via the stores themselves, and the draw that events have, an additional element important to downtown revitalization is that of the partnerships between local businesses and the community. These partnerships are discussed next.

Partnerships with Purpose

As a result of this study, it was found that several community organizations exist whose practices support and publicize efforts to bring people downtown and contribute to revitalization efforts. Although very little literature addresses this topic, according to Faulk (2006), policies developed by community organizations in conjunction with municipal governments can aid in revitalization. The interpretation of data in this study therefore adds to the academic literature on the topic by offering insights into some of the ways that the practices of participating organizations are connected to place, and particularly how they advocate for downtown revitalization and local businesses within the area. Interestingly, it was found that though numerous organizations exist, the practices of each vary depending on their mission and goals.

As discussed in Chapter VI, one of the organizations that is designed to support revitalization downtown, including retail businesses, is the local Chamber of Commerce. As Naomi, a representative from the chamber explains, their practices focus on “Economic development...working to attract businesses to our community and to expand in our community.” She thinks that bringing new industries into the area is important. Although the chamber represents the entire city, Naomi shared with me how a unique place, specifically a thriving downtown, helps to attract companies to the area. Moreover, within the chamber, smaller organizations exist with targeted foci. She continued, saying, “Action Claremont is a community development organization focused on signature projects to enhance the quality of life in Claremont...talent attraction, engagement and retention...those kinds of things.” Her comment suggests that, overall, these practices of the chamber are civically engaged. The importance of chamber participation within the downtown area was reiterated through a recent relocation of its offices three blocks south on Oak Street for the sole purpose of having a more visible presence and association with the actual downtown area.

Although the practices of the Chamber of Commerce reflect the notion of civic engagement, and indicate an interest in community development, their practices do not necessarily consider the specific needs of downtown retail business and the community as one. Naomi spoke of the synergy created with businesses in the downtown, yet local retail business owners shared a different opinion. For example, Abigail, a participant who owns a store located one block from the chamber commented,

A: I hate to say it, but I really don't even know what they do, I mean, I've heard of them of course, but what do they do? And if I join them, what does that mean and what do I have to do then?

As discussed in Chapter VI, a disconnect between this particular organization and local retailers within the downtown is evident, as similar opinions were echoed by other local business owners. Only two of the nine field sites included in this study were members at the time of data collection, and one of them, Bradley, may not renew his membership: "I just got my ummm four or five-hundred-dollar renewal notice in the mail and I'm just thinking...hmmm, do I really need to do that?" Even though the mission of the chamber includes contributing to downtown, their practices are not particularly valued by the local business owners in this study.

Findings highlight that, in contrast to the chamber, the practices of two other organizations included in this study actually do address the needs specific to retailers downtown, and help to contribute to the revitalization of downtown through practices that draw a parallel with both civic engagement (Adler & Goggin, 2005) and responsible capitalism (Keys, Malnight, & Stoklund, 2013). Julia, a representative from one organization, DCI, explains its involvement with local retail businesses,

J: We work with the businesses downtown and try to support them, to drive people to the businesses downtown. We work on large scale economic development and bringing new buildings and jobs to downtown as well...working on the marketing, branding downtown...all sorts of things, infrastructure, that's our main focus.

DCI's practices specifically focus on downtown and this appears to resonate with local retail store owners, as impressions of the organization were generally positive. Their practices include assisting local businesses with not only increasing sales but meeting the needs of the community as well. Signifying this sense of partnership, Sabine mentioned, "We do a lot with DCI." Annalisa, another participant who owns a business downtown, attributed much to the organization and thinks they are committed to the area as a whole, saying, "DCI being on that corner and having a street front presence and campaigning for that end of Oak street is huge." The notion of the organization advocating for the downtown is reflected in Pippa's comment that, "I do feel there is a sense of community downtown. Non-profit organizations such as [the] Downtown Residents' Association and Downtown Claremont, Inc. both help contribute to this sense of community among residents and downtown businesses." In this case, the goals and practices of DCI appear to directly support locally-owned retailers, working alongside them as partners to foster revitalization and draw people to the downtown for the benefit of the entire community. Such support indicates that DCI's practices (i.e. street front presence, working with retailers) connect people (shoppers and local business owners) to the place (downtown). This finding points to how an organization with a specific downtown focus, such as DCI, can effectively partner with local retail business owners to aid in revitalization.

Buy Local First (BLF) is a non-profit organization mentioned by participants as one whose practices contribute to the success of their efforts in the downtown and the community as a whole. The mission of this particular organization is, as Lucy, a Buy Local First representative suggests, "Focusing on...that every penny people spend buying

on the Internet that they could divert to this community would be a huge way to support the community. Your purchasing power is weakening your community without most people even realizing it.” Lucy explained that the organization works alongside local businesses and provides them with resources, saying,

L: Last year we had something we called *summer-school* where we had someone come in and teach social media to our members. And it was extremely popular. Every session was full, so we know there is a need for what we're doing. As far as what the businesses are doing, the networking aspect has been good for the businesses. There is a network of caring.

Liam, a participant who owns a local business in the downtown, thinks Buy Local First has use among local business owners. He said, “We do have a connection [to other businesses]...we can walk down the street or go to a group like Buy Local First to network with people.”

An organization like BLF engages in practices that connect local retail business to others who are also engaged in the same type of practices. Findings suggest that the local focus is key to retail business owners, as compared to membership with organizations like the chamber that are open to all businesses within the area. Annalisa addressed the difference between the two, saying,

A: They both offer events like happy hours for members, but it doesn't seem like many small retailers are part of the chamber and if I want to get help from a networking event, I need people who understand my situation.

Although Faulk (2006) suggests that organizations, in this case the Chamber of Commerce, DCI and BLF, can be key to revitalization efforts, interpretation of the data

for this study revealed that some community partnerships better meet the needs of local retail businesses than others. This study found that organizations specifically focused on the place as the downtown location and/or the practices specific to local business owners are deemed as more useful and better recognize actual needs than do larger, city-wide organizations, such as the chamber. Moreover, this particular finding points to the gaps that exist in terms of the benefits that organizations may think they offer to retail businesses versus what the owners of these businesses actually need.

Ultimately, several factors emerged in the interpretation as contributing to the redevelopment of retail within the downtown area. Perceptions about revitalization taking place downtown credit retail businesses, and especially those that have been established there and have flourished over the years, for the success of the area. In addition to the presence of retail stores, special events are practices that serve as motivation for prompting people to visit downtown, supporting local businesses, and, in turn, furthering the revitalization efforts. Lastly, even though several community partnerships exist, each with a mission of fostering the betterment of the area and supporting the economic success of its businesses, the practices of some organizations appear to be better aligned with the downtown as a specific place and to the practices of local retail store owners within it.

As a final point, the interpretation of the data illustrates how practice theory can explain both individual and organizational practices relative to successful downtown revitalization. For example, the fact that local retail businesses collaborate to host events that not only benefit their own stores, but the wider downtown area, is one such practice.

Similarly, the fact that an organization like that of BLF seeks to connect locally-owned retail businesses through networking opportunities is a practice that does not necessarily benefit the organization, but instead endeavors to benefit the store owners. In the broader context, such practices support downtown revitalization, as successful stores contribute to a successful downtown revitalization process.

High Prices and Slow Progress

Although numerous positive dimensions related to local shopping in the revitalized downtown emerged in the interpretation, negative dimensions were also found. That is, local shopping and local business ownership are not without a downside. Three specific topics emerged and are discussed in this section: (a) *Real Estate Realities*, (b) *Not Enough, Too Unique, and Too Expensive*, and (c) *Parking Problems*.

Real Estate Realities

A key finding of this dissertation is that a fundamental issue impacting revitalization of downtown areas is access to space. Although little research has addressed this topic, according to Leinberger (2005), revitalized downtowns typically offer the most expensive real estate in a city. Real estate for retail store owners is fundamental to the concept of local shopping, and the challenge of expensive, and often inaccessible, real estate was observed repeatedly in this study. Specifically, participants discussed the high lease rates and benefits of owning rather than renting, as well as the fact that the specific location within the downtown area matters. Greg explained that rental rates vary throughout downtown, depending on the level of revitalization the area has experienced, saying “We were not in the position to go five blocks north of here, we

couldn't afford that rent.” Similarly, Annalisa, who is the newest business owner participating in this study, commented “Hopefully I can pay the rent in February,” suggesting that it is challenging to make enough in profit to pay the rent. For some, the cost of rent is actually prohibitive to maintaining their businesses. For instance, John mentioned closing his gallery because of the high costs required to maintain it. When I asked if he owned the building, he responded with, “I lease it, I would have loved to have owned it and to have invested in it, but when I came here I did not have the funds to invest... This would have been a really nice investment.”

Access to and availability of retail space in the downtown is connected to the practices of local business owners, in that it severely impacts their ability to operate a business, and inevitably, impacts downtown revitalization efforts. To this end, Margaret thinks that buying her building is the only way she is able to maintain her business. She said,

M: I'm maybe one of the rare ones....We own the building and the business, if we make money, great, if not...oh well. I couldn't do this if I was paying the rent that they're getting for these places, I'm getting busier, business is picking up...but I'm not that busy.

Although Margaret's experience with owning her space is positive, other local business owners shared their frustration with those who own their spaces and think that it can actually contribute to a lack of revitalization. As Greg, who rents his space, shared, “Some of the businesses who have been here forever, their building is paid off, they aren't aggressive business people,” suggesting there are negative consequences for others when the financial struggles of starting a business are not recognized. It appears that the

practices of local business owners who own their own spaces but do not engage in civic-minded ownership are also negatively impacting other businesses, as well as the overall revitalization efforts.

Alongside discussing the difficulties of affording rent, participants also offered opinions about building owners who no longer operate businesses from the spaces they own, but have simply held onto the vacant space, thereby controlling the future of downtown and the future of revitalization efforts in general. Abigail commented that she has heard of some disputes between building owners and potential renters, and said,

A: I mean, do you want a business in here instead of a vacant building? You want something in the storefront and bringing people downtown. And, you've also got buildings that really need work done before it's viable, so trying to reach an agreement between both parties [is important]...

Bradley shared similar frustrations about the real estate downtown, saying,

B: There have been empty buildings for twenty years and no interest in doing anything with them...that doesn't help the area. All these people doing this hard work of rebuilding the city and then these vacant storefronts hold us back...I wrote an article about it a while back.

Bradley is not only frustrated by the situation, but showed his interests in the civic welfare of the downtown by publishing an article in the local newspaper suggesting that the vacant storefronts are hampering downtown revitalization. Thus, this study points to the importance of building owners to downtown revitalization efforts, whether they engage in retail business ownership or not, and that their practices can actually impede downtown revitalization.

The thematic interpretation points to the ways that downtown real estate problems hinder revitalization efforts. Participants perceive prohibitive lease rates and absent owners as contributing to the problem instead of trying to improve the area. Thus, findings provide support for the idea that real estate is a significant factor contributing to the success, or lack thereof, of revitalization efforts within a downtown (Leinberger, 2005). Moreover, these findings highlight the extent to which civic engagement is clearly necessary to help a downtown revitalize successfully (Cohen, 2007). Specific to this study, downtown revitalization efforts are actually halted when building owners do not consider the implications of practices, in that, their lack of understanding about how keeping buildings vacant impacts the broader community. Investing in the buildings they have been holding on to so that those spaces may be revitalized and used to house stores or other businesses could help the downtown grow and flourish, as well as demonstrate a commitment to community for other building owners to see.

Not Enough, Too Unique, and Too Expensive

Although downtowns are often attractive due to the uniqueness of what they offer consumers, this study found that too much uniqueness may negatively impact local shopping. That is, participants who shop locally frequently expressed frustration regarding the lack of practical merchandise available in the shops downtown. The literature indicates that having retail within the downtown is beneficial because it provides functional benefits to residents and visitors (Chalmers, Gessner, Venteroni, & Weiler, 2011), yet the present study found that sometimes a practical side is lacking.

On the one hand, numerous participants who shop locally suggested that the unique products found in locally-owned stores are a benefit. For example, Sally mentioned, she can usually find “unique items” when she shops downtown, or as Juliette described, “The stuff you can get downtown is unique.” Likewise, Gina explained “I enjoy shopping for unique items in the locally-owned stores especially for holidays and birthdays.” Sentiments like these were common and reveal that the overwhelming majority of local shoppers describe unique product offerings when they talk about what is available in locally-owned stores downtown.

On the other hand, while many praised locally-owned stores for the uniqueness, at the same time, some are frustrated by the product offerings overall and shared a range of perspectives regarding the usefulness of what can be found when shopping downtown. For example, Evelyn said, “I’d like to see more realistic stores, a five and dime, you know, you go, you look, but...you need things you can actually buy, they need something realistic, functional.” Other participants complained about the lack of options downtown. For example, Whitney said,

W: It's a good mix but, it would be nice to have a few more options. It feels like you go downtown, and you have a few stores to go to, but also ones I'd never go to.... I think we have two or three eyeglass places, that seems like a lot. More clothes stores would be good.

Bradley shared a similar point of view on the need for more practical stores downtown, saying, “A good hardware store, things for peoples’ everyday lives, retail...clothing.”

Frustrations with the retail options downtown are not limited to the product offerings, but also extend to practices of product pricing. Alongside a desire for more

practical merchandise, higher than average product pricing was commonly mentioned by shoppers. For example, Laurie, who shops locally downtown stated, “Some have unique selections, but pricing is often an issue.” Bradley even commented on the criticism he hears about prices in his store:

B: What we're selling if you will, is an experience that if you want this kind of store downtown, and doing these kind of events, and is participating in the community as full as we are then there's a small price to pay. One extra dollar to pay, but it's still just the price on the cover of the book.

Bradley is aware that his prices are higher than his competition, but his description of paying an additional dollar seems to reflect that shoppers must have a mindset of civic engagement, and willingness to contribute to the community by helping to keep the store open through the added expense they incur by shopping at his store. Bradley's intentional practice of pricing products higher is due to his beliefs about how his store can contribute to revitalization efforts within downtown.

Findings of this study reveal that simply having retail stores is not sufficient. Although shoppers desire the uniqueness afforded by locally-owned boutiques that add character to the area (Dunham-Jones, 1997; Gratz & Mintz, 1998; Hough, 1990), more practical products that are priced competitively are clearly needed for shoppers to fully support the downtown as a retail destination. The uniqueness of the place (downtown) may at times be connected with practices such as high product pricing, or unique merchandise offerings. Unfortunately, these practices can negatively impact locally-owned businesses if people do not feel strongly about supporting them. Moreover, the ripple effects suggest that if the retail stores cannot succeed, then downtown

revitalization efforts will face a similar fate. Results of this study indicate that no matter how civically engaged the retail store owners are, functional aspects related to product assortment and pricing must be addressed. The next section highlights parking as another key practical issue found to be a problem for shoppers and store owners alike.

Parking Problems

A lack of easily accessible parking can be a major disadvantage for downtown retail stores, and thus can hinder downtown revitalization. Although retail is often cited as a necessary component for downtown revitalization (Warnaby, Bennison, & Davies, 2005), participants, particularly the shoppers, frequently commented on the topic of parking. A few participants are relatively happy with the situation. For instance, Renee commented, “Once I’m parked downtown I can get to nearly everything I want from that spot.” Similarly, Janet shared, “You can always find a parking spot, but you may have to walk.” Others hold more negative attitudes about parking. For instance, Jolene shared, “Walking from store to store is a healthy way to shop. I just don’t like having to park too far away,” and as Alex commented, “The worst thing [about shopping downtown] is definitely the parking.”

The local business owners participating in this study also commented on how parking affects their businesses. For example, Samantha exclaimed, “Oh, parking, parking for sure [is a problem]... it’s crazy that people complain about parking here!” Liam shared similar frustrations about the parking complaints he hears from his customers, saying, “People don’t want to park and walk a block. It’s “Target Syndrome,”

you park and go in...even though you park and may have to walk the same distance from your parking spot to the front door.”

Although the literature suggests that walkability is one key for successful downtown revitalization (Faulk, 2006; Robertson, 1999), and the idea of walkability is something that some participants voiced as a benefit, the reality of the situation suggests that parking can be a problem for those who own stores and those who shop downtown. Shoppers seek a balance of the character and quaint sense of place the downtown offers, yet also desire the conveniences that are found in more modern shopping centers, such as close parking. Therefore, in order for revitalization to succeed, a solution to parking problems is needed to draw more shoppers downtown. Literature specific to downtown shopping has not addressed the matter of parking and its significance to the overall phenomenon. This practical issue related to place impacts downtown revitalization, as it may keep people from engaging in the practice of local shopping. A lack of effort on the part of shoppers to do something such as find parking downtown therefore can have greater impact on overall downtown revitalization than one might think.

What makes local shopping distinctive for consumers encompasses not only the uniqueness of the place, but it offers ways for people to connect with the notion of local. Findings from this study suggest that shoppers desire such connections, and that, as a result, locally-owned retailers play an important part in the revitalization of downtown. The practices of locally-owned businesses combined with those of community partnership organizations can give shoppers a reason to go downtown, whether it is through hosting events or simply contributing to the buzz that comes from the

establishment of retail businesses within the area. However, findings of this dissertation also point to some functional drawbacks that exist, affecting shoppers, business owners, and ultimately the downtown revitalization process.

Why is Downtown Revitalization Important?

Shopping for Revitalization links the three primary conceptual areas of place, people, and practices through three sub-themes in order to address the guiding research questions of what makes shopping locally in the downtown area distinctive for consumers and what the appeal of a downtown area is for local retail store owners.

Connections between place, people, and practices shed light on the motivations for and meanings of shopping locally in a revitalized downtown. Findings specific to this section explain the relationships between the three areas and help to address what makes shopping locally distinctive for consumers as well as why the area is appealing for local business owners. These points are illustrated in Figure 19. Findings reveal that shoppers and local business owners alike hold strong opinions about shopping and seek a differentiated experience. Moreover, participants suggest that interpersonal relationships among shoppers and local store owners are an important part of the local shopping experience. The findings from this dissertation also indicate that people who are local developers and building owners, as well as those who are involved with community partnerships are fundamental to the future of downtown shopping. Specific to place, the findings reveal that the downtown area offers a more enjoyable experience for shopping and local retail business ownership, which point to shifts in shopping practices and specifically to shopping downtown. Participants reveal that their experiences with

shopping downtown, and even in specific stores, help to bond them to the place. Last, an important part of the local shopping experience focuses on the functional aspects of the place, as issues such as parking and access to retail space were revealed as important to ensuring the success of local retail stores and the downtown revitalization process overall.



Figure 19. Conceptual Framework: Local Shopping and Store Ownership in a Revitalized Downtown

The conceptual framework (Figure 19) also points to the way that practices contribute to the community, and are fundamental to the motivations for and meanings of shopping locally. Findings suggest people shop locally because they want to support the places downtown, places that bond people to the area in a variety of ways, including through interpersonal relationships, the unique product and service offerings, and the sense of place they associate with the downtown. Hosting and attending events are practices that contribute to the overall revitalization of downtown because they draw people to the area and help to provide economic support for the businesses there. Last, it must be noted that findings reveal the power of practices undertaken by community partnership organizations and building owners and/or developers, in that downtown revitalization is contingent on whether or not their practices seek to benefit the community and partner with local business owners downtown.

To conclude, the reasons for shopping local and the meanings that this consumption behavior conveys were explored in this chapter. As discussed, practice theory, and specifically the conceptual framework developed for this dissertation are useful for interpreting the broader significance of these practices for the revitalization of downtown. For shoppers participating in this study, whether the practice of local shopping suggests a means of activism and empowerment, civic engagement, relationship building, or is simply a way to demonstrate their social consciousness, it is clear that these individuals are not just “buying something.” Instead, they are expressing their deeply held values through their everyday activities, and especially their shopping-related practices.

Similarly, for the business owners participating in this study, interpretation of the data revealed the connections between place, people, and practices in relation to the existing research on these topics. Local business owners described how their practices connect them to the downtown, the civic duties they feel they are fulfilling through their practices related to business ownership, and the significance of the people that their practices connect them with. Such interpretation of the data indicates that, for many store owners and employees, their everyday roles are more than jobs, but are opportunities to positively impact the people and the place through their practices. This perspective exemplifies what practice theory means for consumption and for business ownership because it demonstrates the power of everyday practices like shopping when engaged in an intentional manner and with sincere commitment.

In this chapter, the ways that the three substantive areas converge within the framework of practice theory illuminates what makes the downtown unique both for the people who shop and the people who own businesses there. Participants' practices are forms of activism, civic engagement, and responsible capitalism, as they express a desire to support and maintain locally-owned businesses, creating positive social and economic change for the community. Additionally, the socially conscious consumption practices described in this chapter highlight the value participants assign to local products, places, producers, and personal experiences. Despite the negative impact that some of the functional aspects, such as real estate and parking, have on the downtown shopping experience, practices of local business owners reveal their commitment to the downtown, their craft, and the community of retailers they have created. Last, the outcomes of these

practices have resulted in a revitalization process that relies on consumers' shifting shopping practices, civically engaged ownership practices, and partnership practices of community organizations. Thus, the findings from this dissertation highlight how the variety of seemingly routine practices that participants engage in aid in enhancing the broader community, as it is through each of these practices and all of these people that downtown revitalization can succeed.

Summary

In this chapter, the concepts of place, people, and practices were explored through consideration of the theoretical implications of the thematic interpretation. In the next chapter, findings and limitations are discussed and potential avenues for future research on the topic are provided.

CHAPTER VIII

REFLECTION AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation is one of the first academic studies to examine the phenomenon of “shopping local” and to do so specifically within the context of downtown revitalization. The aim of this dissertation was to develop an in-depth understanding of the experience of local shopping, both on the part of the shopper and the local store owner. To this end, I sought to understand the motivations for and meanings of shopping local, and to investigate the implications of these meanings for downtown revitalization. Drawing on literatures in consumer behavior, downtown revitalization, and civic engagement, and considered through the lens of practice theory, findings reveal that shopping local is a meaningful practice that extends far beyond just a simple economic transaction.

This study is one of the first to consider the perspectives of local retail business owners along with those who shop in their stores. As a result, this dissertation offers one of the few examinations of local store ownership as part of the shopping local phenomenon and as situated in a revitalization context. In addition to the experiences of shoppers and business owners, insights from community organizations were also explored. Thus, findings of this study have implications for expanding thought not just related to consumer shopping behaviors and retailing, but to downtown revitalization, and especially matters relating to creating effective community partnerships. Last, findings

from this dissertation have implications for practice, specifically for local retailers who wish to set up shop in areas undergoing revitalization.

The goals of this chapter are to discuss the research process and to consider the relevance of findings for theory and practice. To this end, this chapter is divided into four sections: (1) *Reflecting on the Process*, (2) *Theoretical Implications of the Outcomes*, (3) *Practical Implications of the Outcomes*, and (4) *Limitations and Future Research*. First, my reflections on the goals and objectives of the study relative to the methodological process of data collection and interpretation are discussed. Next, the significant findings that emerged through data interpretation, and the implications of these findings, are presented. Last, a discussion of the study's limitations is provided along with opportunities for future research.

Reflecting on the Process

Throughout this dissertation, I employed ethnographic and digital methods of data collection to gain an in-depth understanding of what shopping local means. These methods were combined to provide a true-to-life investigation of local shopping, as consumers not only shop in brick-and-mortar stores, but many will also follow stores through social media for information about events and promotions, as well as for online shopping. Utilizing both ethnographic and digital methods of data collection allowed me to experience local shopping as a typical shopper might. Thus, I was able to go in and out of stores within the local downtown, visiting them on a regular basis, while also following them on their social media accounts to keep me up-to-date with events and promotions, just as any shopper may do. I made purchases at many of the businesses,

attended events at some of them, and built relationships with business owners participating in this study, just as shoppers who frequent the same stores might do. In addition, I photographed places in and around the downtown area and inside the businesses in order to provide a more complete picture of the area and the stores included in the field.

Similar to what other shoppers may experience, at times I found myself frustrated by high prices in some of the stores, and at other times, by the limited options available. Also, like other shoppers, I enjoyed the relational aspect of connections with owners and employees and was often surprised by the frankness of some of them in talking with me about their experiences. My experiences with the local business owners were largely positive, even though they all face time and money constraints due to their roles as small business owners. I was able to make a connection with each of the business owners participating in this study by either walking in and having face-to-face conversations with them, or by being directed to reach out to them via email. In only one instance did I experience any sort of reluctance to put me in touch with an owner, however, upon making contact with the individual, my research was well-received. Likewise, I experienced a sense of community and camaraderie among the retailers, as nearly every business owner offered to connect me with other business owners in the downtown.

Due to the systematic social media monitoring that was part of the data collection process, I may have noticed things other shoppers do not typically consider. For instance, I observed a wide range of differences regarding social media use among businesses. Two retailers updated their social media accounts regularly, while three

others posted sporadically, and the last four posted the least frequently, ranging from every couple of weeks to just once during the eight-week data collection period. Moreover, I observed fewer interactions in the way of comments or questions and answers among customers and businesses on their social media accounts than I had anticipated. Going in I expected to observe more two-way communication.

While my interactions and connections with local business owners came without much difficulty, one challenge I encountered during data collection was recruiting participants who shop locally. Overall, I found shoppers to be wary of being approached downtown and I often encountered situations where participants were en-route to lunch, or were busy, or mentioned things such as they were rushing to meetings and therefore they were not interested in talking. Specific to field interviews, themes emerged early in data collection and remained consistent regarding reasons for shopping locally and both the advantages and drawbacks of the downtown location. In regards to recruiting participants for in-depth interviews, I found that some of the most eager participants were particularly interested in sharing their frustrations with downtown shopping rather than their reasons for visiting the area. Local business owners also assisted in the process by making informal introductions if regulars were in the store at the same time that I was. The interviews resulting from these contacts tended to offer more favorable opinions of downtown shopping and an overall interest in the civic welfare of business owners and the community.

Along with difficulty recruiting participants who shop locally, another challenge was spending quality time in each of the locations due to the nature of the businesses.

Because many of the businesses are small retail stores, I often could not spend more than ten to fifteen minutes at a time browsing and chatting before I had perused the entire store while still being conscious of the store owner's time. Moreover, it was apparent early in the data collection period that most of the businesses are fairly slow and quiet during typical workday hours, with the busiest times occurring during weekend and evening hours. The lack of activity and shoppers during many of my observation periods made data collection more difficult than anticipated. I had to shift my observation periods to include more evening and weekend hours in order to have interactions to observe.

Interestingly, the weather also impacted data collection efforts. I had planned to conduct in-depth interviews with each of the business owners first, and then shift to shopper interviews. Unfortunately, the weather changed as I was wrapping up the owner interviews, therefore even fewer people were walking around in the downtown area than at the start of the data collection period. In retrospect, combining shopper interviews during the earliest parts of the data collection period might have helped to alleviate this challenge. Although I still think it was useful to speak with business owners first, the practicality of being able to speak with them inside of their stores meant that the weather would not have hindered my opportunity to talk with owners as much as it did when I approached shoppers on the street, once the weather grew cooler.

By the end of the data collection period I had built relationships with several of the local business owners and I feel as though I am abandoning them somewhat now when I go downtown and no longer stop in to visit with them. Even though they are aware of my timeline, it seems as though several of them had become accustomed to me

stopping in to visit their stores. I still stop in on occasion to say *hello* to some of the business owners, and at other times I find myself avoiding particular blocks of downtown altogether.

Throughout the research process, I found that once the conversations were started, people really enjoyed talking about their local shopping experiences, their experiences with operating a local business in the downtown, or even talking about the changes they have witnessed in the downtown area. I also found myself reflecting on the vast amount of change I have seen downtown, and am very hopeful for the future of the area, and the people and local businesses within it. This dissertation serves as a means of sharing what I have learned with those who seek to continue making positive changes and creating a vibrant downtown once more. The academic significance of such changes is discussed in the next section.

Theoretical Implications of the Outcomes

As was discussed in previous chapters, trends point to a renewed interest in downtown shopping, therefore, it is to be expected that retailers will play an important role in revitalization efforts. Locally-owned businesses are usually some of the first to take a chance on these areas, and such is the case with the local stores included in this dissertation. The investigation into the topic revealed findings that have implications for the academic literatures of consumer behavior and retailing. This section of the chapter presents discussion of these implications and is organized by the following topics: (1) *Who Shops Locally and Why?* (2) *Local Retail Owners: Civically Engaged People*, (3) *Downtown Retail and Revitalization*, and (4) *Putting Practice into Theory*.

Who Shops Locally and Why?

As pointed out at the beginning of this dissertation, little is known about why individuals support locally-owned retail stores. Previous research on the topic of local shopping has addressed urban planning and transportation related to local shopping (Handy & Clifton, 2001), as well as in-shopping and out-shopping (e.g., Dalal, Al-Khatib, DaCosta, & Ronald, 1994; Hozier & Stem, 1985). Yet, overall, very few studies specifically address the topic as explored in the present study. Therefore, a key theoretical implication is that it contributes to the consumer behavior literature on the topic by shedding light on what motivates consumers to shop locally. Findings indicate that local shopping is more complex than what may appear and will likely continue to be an area in need of further investigation.

As depicted in the conceptual framework guiding this study, one of three substantive areas addressed in this dissertation relates to people. In Chapter II, it was noted that, although socially conscious consumers and voluntary simplifiers hold values that seem to support the concept of local shopping, local shopping behaviors among socially conscious consumers had been relatively unknown and overlooked until the present study. That is, prior to this dissertation, identifying where these consumers choose to shop and why has gone unstudied. Thus, a key finding from this study is that consumers who shop locally are socially conscious consumers. In relation to a more specific group of socially conscious consumers, voluntary simplifiers, although some local shoppers have simplified their lives and shared similar values, all participants who shop locally could not be described this way. Based on these findings, further

exploration of where socially conscious consumers and voluntary simplifiers shop may shed more light on how local shopping relates to these two consumer groups. In particular, further exploration of these consumer groups could also enhance the understanding of the connection between people and practices, specifically local shopping practices. This is an important area of research, as shopping trends are shifting and point to more local shopping, which will have a significant economic impact on retailers. Last, based on the findings, it appears that gender is not necessarily a factor in the decision to shop local as a means of socially conscious consumption and voluntary simplicity. Further research could be used to better determine the role of gender relative to shopping local.

This study shows that people who shop locally share an interest in supporting the community more broadly. Moreover, these shoppers view local shopping as one practice that goes beyond helping themselves to providing support for others. Thus, local shopping can be considered an act of civic engagement. This finding adds to the literature on civic engagement, as consumption has yet to be considered relative to the concept, and definitions of the concept usually frame it in general terms, rather than through specific practices. Thus, local shopping is a good starting point for investigating this connection and could be a useful lens through which to examine other types of consumption, such as Fair Trade, Made in the USA, and making charitable contributions through purchases, just to name a few.

One way that local shopping makes a difference in the community is through the interpersonal relationships that develop as a result of the practice. The findings of this

dissertation demonstrate that through the phenomenon of shopping local, a sense of community can be created between shoppers and store owners and/or employees. Such relationships emerged as important to shoppers and are often what prompts them to shop locally. The level of recognition that shoppers described having with local store owners and employees encouraged them visit stores in the downtown. Added research on the topic of interpersonal relationships in shopping local would help to clarify the role of local ownership in consumers' decisions to shop downtown.

Another key theoretical implication of this study is that the place where people shop is important. Robertson (1999) found that downtowns have a clear advantage over shopping malls due to the "sense of place" they offer consumers. However, few studies consider how people attach meaning to places via retail businesses. This study found that shoppers grow attached to the place through visual aspects, such as the buildings and public art, and the overall atmosphere they experience while there. The combination of the relationships and the unique sense of place contributes to the distinctiveness of the shopping local experience and were commonly cited as reasons why participants shop local in the downtown area. The attachment shoppers experience even prompts them to want to "hang out" or "linger" in the area, whether they are buying something or just browsing. Based on the findings of this dissertation, added research dedicated to the effects of sense of place on downtown retail can lead to a better understanding of the particular ways that shoppers bond with downtown retail and can foster greater success on the part of downtown retailers. Moreover, the conceptual model created for this

dissertation can be a useful tool for further research that considers the bonds that people create with places and how this bond may or may not motivate their shopping practices.

Indeed, observation and conversations with participants who shop locally revealed that local shopping is about more than the products that participants' purchase. Local shopping is a practice that people engage in to support local businesses and express their deeply-held beliefs about how consumption can benefit their communities. Moreover, local shopping is a practice that helps to shape the community through the relationships that develop, simply by purchasing something. Yet, as this study shows, local shoppers are just one group of people important to understanding the experience of local shopping. The next section focuses on the local store owners who are also key to understanding the experience.

Local Retail Owners: Civically Engaged People

This section summarizes the findings and contributions related to another group of individuals who are important to the purpose of this dissertation: the local business owners. As discussed in Chapter II, very little research exists that addresses the role of local business owners, therefore, the present study is one of the first to examine their motivations for operating in downtown locations undergoing revitalization. The literature on civic engagement suggests that local business owners foster civic welfare through their business ownership practices (Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson & Nucci, 2002) and indeed, this was found to be the case among business owners participating in this study. Local retail business owners in this study often discussed how it is their "duty" to the community, to other retailers, and to the downtown area to establish their businesses and

to remain open because of what they offer and because of what their presence signals to others. Moreover, particular to this dissertation, civic engagement built among local business owners emerged in the form of camaraderie. This camaraderie includes practices like working together to put on events within the downtown area and to promote each other through word-of-mouth, and even to provide marketing for other businesses within their own stores. This finding is important not just for understanding local ownership practices that support revitalization, but how a sense of collaboration rather than competition may actually lead to more successful retail ventures in general.

Another way that local retail business ownership practices can foster civic engagement is through the commitment that owners have to their customers and to their craft. Results of this study revealed that participants who own businesses focus on the people who shop in their stores and what they hope to provide for them, rather than just profit. Examples of such actions among participants include Abigail's decision to purchase the yarn store in order to keep it open for the community, or Bradley's practice of hosting community events in an attempt to draw people to the downtown area and get them involved in community life. John's commitment to sharing art with the community, even though he is not benefitting financially from his gallery, is another example of this kind of commitment. Because these store owners are not solely focused on the financial gains of their businesses, it would be useful to further examine the connection between profitability and civically-minded business practices as a strategy for independently owned retail stores.

Similarly, the exploration of civic motivations of local business owners adds depth to the relatively recent concept of responsible capitalism. This idea particularly emerged through the ways that these local business owners view themselves as a part of the whole community, instead of separate from it. Practices among local business owners reflected this concept in a variety of ways, such as Margaret's concern about making "too much money" on an item that she herself purchased for very little.

Specific to the place, findings from this dissertation reveal that local business owners are connected to the area in which they own and operate their businesses. For store owners, the attachment is often described as the vision they have for their particular stores or for the area of downtown where their stores are located. This often led to the decision to open a business and participate in committees and organizations in order to further downtown development. Specifically, through place attachment, a strong connection between the people who own local businesses and the downtown area is forged.

Findings related to the local business owners and their practices indicate that they are connected to the place where they do business by engaging in practices that contribute to its economic and social welfare. Therefore, discovery of the civically-engaged motivations of local business owners in this study, and especially their collaborative practices, make an important contribution to the retailing literature.

Downtown Retail and Revitalization

As this study reveals, the presence of retail in the downtown area is helping to reenergize a once forgotten part of the city. Very few studies have addressed the

contributions retail makes to downtown revitalization (Cohen, 2007; Padilla & Eastlick, 2008), therefore, this dissertation adds much to the scant literature on the topic. Shoppers and business owners alike talked about the importance of the downtown area and specifically the buzz that emanates from downtown because of the businesses that have set up shop there. Specific to this dissertation, retail was often credited with revitalizing the downtown area through the economic benefits it provides. Shoppers discussed revitalization in terms of the visible changes they have witnessed within the downtown, and business owners referred to revitalization in terms of the numbers of stores and of people or shoppers frequenting the area.

Another contribution specific to the conceptual area of place relates to the space downtown. Findings from this study are the first to highlight some of the more general and functional issues related to retail and downtown revitalization. Some of these issues include challenges related to the unique spaces that downtowns afford, frustrations with absent building owners, and expensive lease rates, to name just a few. Previous literature on downtown revitalization has mostly been prescriptive, presenting case studies on implementation of policies and programming (Burayidi, 2001) or simply describing successes and failures of specific locations (Faulk, 2006). Because the present research uncovered issues that are fairly generalizable, this information will be useful in future studies that examine downtown revitalization and retail space in other locations.

Although the revitalized downtown naturally connects to the concept of sense of place, findings related to practices of organizations were also found to be important. As seen in this study, along with the actions of individuals, community partnership

organizations are groups whose practices are important to understanding the relationship between local business and revitalization in the downtown area. According to Faulk (2006), such community partnership organizations have an interest in economic growth. Yet, how such organizations contribute to revitalization and specifically how they collaborate with retailers in the process, had not been fully explored. Thus, findings from this dissertation are the first to highlight these relationships and the role they play in revitalization efforts, and especially the success of retailers in the process of revitalizing downtown areas. This study found that there are many organizations that wish to contribute to the community and the people with it, yet some have a better understanding of how to do so effectively and especially for retail store owners. As the prevalence of downtown revitalization continues to grow, the relationships between community partnership organizations and local retail businesses in the downtown will likely continue to play an integral role in the process.

In sum, this study is important because it offers further evidence that retail is key for downtown revitalization. Revitalization through retail adds significant value to downtown areas and creates thriving retail districts for shoppers, while also providing opportunities for local business owners to earn a living.

Putting Practices into Theory

This is the first study to consider how practice theory frames the meanings of local shopping. Within the study of consumer behavior, few, if any, existing studies related to the topic of local shopping employ theory to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon. Through practice theory, everyday habits and routines are considered as

observable social practices, rather than mundane activities (Southerton, 2013). This study is the first to consider the decisions and circumstances surrounding routine consumption habits as key to the ways that the phenomenon of local shopping can actually serve the greater good, and specifically to facilitate community-building through downtown revitalization.

As revealed by this dissertation, people who shop locally are investing in places (i.e. their community) and engage in shopping practices (i.e. supporting locally-owned retailers) for reasons beyond simply fulfilling functional product- or service-related needs. Indeed, their shopping habits are more than routine habits, but are instead motivated by deep desires to support their local community and the local owners who operate businesses downtown. Likewise, for local retail business owners, it is clear that their motivations to own and operate a business (a practice) within the downtown area extend beyond simply seeking to make a profit. In fact, the majority of the business owners in this dissertation are not particularly profitable, but prefer to focus on how their business serves a greater purpose than just selling “stuff.” This study revealed that these business owners are motivated by more altruistic goals, such as providing specific experiences, products, spaces, and knowledge to people within their community, even if it is at the expense of making a sale.

By examining the motivations and meanings of the experience of local shopping through the lens of practice theory and the three conceptual areas of people, place and practices, it becomes clear that people are indeed doing more than just “shopping.” Findings highlight the complex nature of local shopping through the functional, social,

economic, aesthetic and communal factors involved with the practice. Based on the findings of this dissertation, people are consciously creating and sustaining community through their practices related to local shopping and local business ownership. This study extends the application of practice theory as it examines the meanings people assign to shopping local. Likewise, this study sheds light on the ways that local shopping and local retail business ownership create positive changes within the community that contribute to downtown revitalization. Moreover, based on the findings of this study it is apparent that local business ownership and local shopping, as practices, offer a means of activism and empowerment in the ways that they contribute to economic and social support for the area. These practices also help in building the social fabric of the community through the interpersonal connections created. Practice theory helps to explain how, through shopping, people work together to share in the success of the community and to engage in practices that support revitalization of the downtown.

This research highlights the need for added examination of the practice of local shopping. In essence, it demonstrates that the reasons one has for shopping in particular places, such as a revitalized downtown or at a locally-owned store, may be different than the reasons one has for shopping in chain stores and/or shopping malls. Practice theory is useful for investigating the deeper meaning shoppers ascribe to this practice and for understanding more about the people who are likely to shop locally. Based on the findings of this study, it is not necessarily about *what* people buy when they shop locally, but *why* they buy that is important.

Practical Implications of the Outcomes

Along with the academic implications of this study, several practical implications emerged. For example, shoppers experience frustration with the lack of functional products available in the locally-owned retail stores downtown and cited this as a reason why they do not spend a lot of money when shopping locally. This result presents an opportunity for retailers and suggests that locally-owned stores could capitalize on this need and complement the unique items they currently carry by adding more functional items. Doing so would allow locally-owned retailers to remain differentiated from chain stores, but also offer more practical products that serve everyday needs.

Although shoppers desire functional products in locally-owned stores, they also interpret unique product offerings as high quality. Thus, when locally-owned retailers include more functional products in their merchandise assortment they need to consider the level of quality to ensure consistency between unique and practical product offerings. Merchandise quality should be consistent with the overall store image they want to create and maintain.

Through this dissertation it has become clear that interpersonal relationships are built through local shopping. In particular, it was found that this perspective is as important to shoppers as it is to the store owners. This is an aspect of the study's findings that could be of benefit to retailers going forward. That is, in view of this finding, local retail store owners can make the most of the desire on the part of shoppers to build relationships and to better tailor retail offerings to their customers, potentially avoiding customer frustration regarding product assortment.

Along the same lines, this dissertation found that a camaraderie exists among local retail store owners within the downtown, and interestingly, that they share a general attitude of collaboration rather than competition. Nonetheless, communication between local retail stores is infrequent and the data revealed varying hours and days of operations among them. Thus, locally-owned retail stores could collaborate more formally to take advantage of the solidarity and to avoid communication disconnects. This could provide consistency among store hours and allow for added opportunities for joint marketing, or even communal events, such as an all-downtown sidewalk sale.

It has been argued that retail is vital to downtown revitalization (Sneed, Runyan, Swinney, & Lin, 2011) and this study found no different. The Chamber of Commerce understands the importance of a thriving downtown in order to attract businesses to the area, however, it was found to be rather uninformed about the reasons locally-owned retail stores in the downtown are not members. By taking the time to actively communicate with local retail businesses, organizations like the chamber could better understand the drawbacks that retailers see when considering membership, such as exorbitant membership fees and services that are deemed ineffective or even useless. By making membership opportunities more financially accessible, as well as member events more beneficial for small retailers, more local retail businesses would be likely to join, and together their practices could shape the future of downtown.

The results show that shoppers are drawn to the unique character and quaint sense of place the downtown offers. For cities, this finding is significant, as the downtown area should be considered an important asset because it is likely to draw local residents and

tourists to the area for shopping, dining, and entertainment. This activity, in turn, provides an economic stimulus for the area. This dissertation found that many functional issues require attention for a city to be able to leverage the advantage of a downtown area. Cities need to be concerned with helping retailers access downtown real estate and working alongside property developers to ensure that buildings are maintained and kept in operable condition while upholding the historic charm that often attracts people to a downtown. Moreover, cities and urban planners need to address space within the downtown, particularly to ensure that shoppers can gain easy access to parking and retail options. The practical implications of these findings are important for city planners, property developers, and government agencies who seek to revitalize downtown areas.

Limitations and Future Research

In this dissertation, I explored local shopping in a revitalized downtown using ethnographic methods. This approach allowed me to explore the motivations for and meanings of the experience from multiple perspectives, including the local business owners, the people who shop locally, and people who are part of community partnership organizations. While findings of this dissertation are significant to the people, places, and practices that contribute to downtown revitalization through local shopping, findings are limited to a single downtown area. This is a matter that future research must explore. It is suggested that similar studies be carried out in a variety of other locations, including cities of varying sizes to explore similarities and differences that may emerge. Likewise, this particular study was conducted in the Southeastern United States. Future studies

could examine whether similarities or differences arise that may be related to the culture or history of a region.

As discussed in the thematic interpretation chapters, the downtown area of this particular city has been undergoing revitalization for many years, and has experienced a great deal of progress. Future research could explore areas where the revitalization process is in the early stage, as well as those where revitalization has entirely succeeded. Likewise, it would be interesting to note whether differences exist related to shopper and retail business owner practices specific to the stage of revitalization that a particular area is in.

In the reflection portion of this chapter, I discussed the data collection period. This is a limitation to this study as it offers a “snapshot” of the phenomenon of local shopping. However, due to the continuously changing nature of both downtown revitalization and consumer shopping trends, future studies that are longer in duration are needed because old businesses are always closing, and new ones are opening. Future research should therefore consider a longitudinal research design, as it may provide a more nuanced understanding of local shopping and how it changes over time. Such an approach could also take into consideration the fluctuations of the retail industry as a whole.

Because this study is limited to the motivations and meanings specific to locally-owned stores in a revitalized downtown, future research should consider the potential effects of chain stores operating in a revitalized downtown. For instance, in this study shoppers expressed desires to support the downtown retailers due to their connection with

the local community, however, if the downtown retailers are chain stores without local owners, it could potentially have a negative impact on the commitment shoppers have to the area and to supporting the businesses that locate there. Research on this topic is needed, as one participant in this study actually thought a chain store, like the Gap, was needed in the area. Clearly, opinions on the subject are mixed.

Last, this study explored community partnership organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce relative to locally-owned retail stores and specifically within the context of downtown revitalization. This is among the first studies to do so. Future research should therefore be devoted to understanding how community partnership organizations and local retail businesses partner to influence downtown revitalization. Investigating the specific ways that community partnership organizations can offer support for local retail businesses and create mutual benefits for the owners and the community is an important area for researchers to explore.

To conclude, the aim of this study was to explore the experiences of shopping at locally-owned stores as well as owning and operating such stores within a revitalized downtown. Investigating local shopping within the context of a revitalized downtown allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of the practices (i.e., local shopping and local business ownership) of shoppers and business owners (people), and how they both contribute to revitalization efforts, in ways that benefit the broader community (place). This exploration was guided by three objectives: (1) to explore the reasons why consumers choose to shop locally, (2) to consider the reasons why business owners

choose to operate within the revitalized downtown, and (3) to examine the implications of shopping locally within the revitalized downtown context for the broader community.

Specific to the first research objective, it was found that consumers who shop locally value local shopping as much, if not more, for the interpersonal relationships and opportunities to support the community it affords, than the unique product offerings they can find. Therefore, shoppers engage in the practice as consumer activism and community building, in as much as they consider it making a statement through their consumption practices. In relation to the second objective, local business owners are committed to their customers, their calling, and the community as much, if not more so than they are to maintaining a revenue stream. Moreover, they are committed to the notion of building camaraderie among other local business owners, and exhibit this commitment through a collaborative approach rather than through competition. Last, relative to the final objective, this investigation revealed a desire to care for the local community on the part of both local shoppers and local business owners, or a perspective of locally-oriented responsible capitalism, suggesting that people who engage in local shopping practices do so with the well-being of others, or the community, in mind, rather than simply their own self-interests. In doing so, this has created a revitalized downtown area that is the type of place where people want to “linger” or “hang out.” As a result, the downtown community benefits economically and socially, and revitalization succeeds in bringing more people downtown. It is a positive cycle of change.

In conclusion, this dissertation highlights the significance of practices such as local shopping and local retail business ownership relative to downtown revitalization

efforts. Local business owners, like those in this study, often have a vested interest in the downtown, and their efforts are civically motivated and contribute to the greater good, thereby fostering revitalization. Similarly, for people who shop locally, shopping often means more than simply buying something. Shoppers are compelled to buy from locally-owned stores because they feel as though they are supporting neighbors, and in turn, that this support helps to create positive changes in the downtown area. When local business owners take a chance on up-and-coming downtown areas, and shoppers financially support their efforts to do so, the result is a unique place that is filled with opportunities for shopping, but also for being a part of the community. Local shopping provides the reason for people to come back to a once abandoned urban area. Consequently, this dissertation establishes the importance of a collaborative relationship between local shopping and local business ownership and provides evidence of its significance to downtown revitalization efforts.

As seen by this dissertation, local shopping and local business ownership are more complex practices than what may be apparent to the casual observer. Although the focus of many consumption activities relates to either buying or selling an item or service, it is clear that these everyday practices are often driven by the values of local shoppers and local business owners that pertain to something larger than just self-interest. Thus, there is a great deal of meaning behind their consumption habits that must be unpacked in order to fully understand what is possible through shopping local.

Likewise, the constant evolution of retail points to the return of retail to downtown areas across the US. As this study revealed, changing perspectives on

consumption and local business ownership on the part of some individuals has shifted the focus from just making a profit, or just consuming for the sake of consuming, to more relational and impactful practices. As this is the first study to explore the phenomenon of local shopping in this way, future studies are needed in order to advance our overall understanding of the topic.

As was revealed through this dissertation, the motivations for and meanings of local shopping provide a unique perspective on consumption by considering how it can actually support the greater good. Making the choice to shop locally requires both mindfulness and genuine effort on the part of consumers and retailers. When someone makes the choice to “shop local,” they are choosing to go beyond just purchasing something from someone. Rather, it is a choice that is personally empowering and socially impactful, and points the way to a future in which consumption practices make a difference as meaningful parts within the larger whole.

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APPENDIX A

OBSERVATION TEMPLATE

General Information

1. Location name
2. Date
3. Time
4. Weather

Actors

5. Employees working (# of employees, approximate ages, ethnicity, gender)
6. Customers (# of customers, approximate ages, ethnicity and gender)

Physical Environment

7. Physical layout and appearance of the location (inside and outside, features of neighborhood, size of establishment)

Social Setting

8. What is happening in the general proximity of the location?
9. Store setting (i.e. music, scents, noise level, general culture)

Space and Objects in the Setting

10. Space within the store (the arrangement/traffic patterns, location of registers, fitting rooms, bar, restrooms, etc...)
11. Signage within the store (size, purpose, messages that may be inferred)
12. Items displayed or for sale

Events and Interactions

- 13. General activities
- 14. Interactions (i.e. conversations between employees, customers, etc...)
- 15. Employee activities (i.e. ringing up sales, assisting customers, etc...)
- 16. Customer activities (i.e. browsing, conversing, actively purchasing)

Source: Merriam, 1998

APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHY TEMPLATE

Exterior

1. Outside of the establishment
2. Store signage
3. Store window(s)
4. Advertisements or notices posted on windows and doors
5. Street views (left, right and across the street from the establishment)
6. Downtown “areas” (buildings, parks, seating areas, outdoor public art displays)

Interior

7. General interior overview of establishment
8. Cash registers
9. Merchandise displayed in the establishment
10. Signage posted around the store
11. Advertisements, flyers or notices posted or set out for distribution
12. Fitting rooms, restrooms, etc..
13. Equipment (i.e. coffee makers, beer tanks, etc...)
14. Seating areas
15. Counter or bar areas

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL FORM



THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA
GREENSBORO

OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY
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Web site: www.uncg.edu/orc
~~Federalwide~~ Assurance (FWA) #216

To: Jennifer Wilson
Cons, Apparel, and Ret ~~Stds~~
Cons, Apparel, and Ret ~~Stds~~

From: UNCG IRB

Date: 7/11/2017

RE: Determination that Research or Research-Like Activity does not require IRB Approval

Study #: 17-0229

Study Title: Shopping locally, locally-owned businesses and downtown revitalization

This submission was reviewed by the above-referenced IRB. The IRB has determined that this submission does not constitute human subjects research as defined under federal regulations [45 CFR 46.102 (d or f)] and does not require IRB approval.

Study Description:

The overall goal of this research project is to explore the experience of shopping locally and how supporting locally-owned businesses in the downtown area may impact revitalization efforts in the downtown.

If your study protocol changes in such a way that this determination will no longer apply, you should contact the above IRB before making the changes.

CC:

Nancy Hodges, Cons, Apparel, and Ret ~~Stds~~

APPENDIX D
FIELD INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule: Customers – Field

Shopping Experiences

1. How often do you come downtown to shop?
2. Which places do you shop at when you're downtown? And why do you shop here?
3. What did you buy today? Why did you buy it? How much did you spend?
4. How do you feel about shopping at locally-owned stores?
5. Would you describe yourself as someone who is interested in the wellbeing of others, and engages in activities that improve the quality of life of others?
6. What do you think shopping downtown says about you as a person?
7. Do you feel like you, as an individual, can make a difference with your shopping habits? If so, explain.
8. Do you ever try to limit your consumption, and not just as a way to reduce spending? If so, explain.
9. Would you say that you have tried to consciously simplify your life in any other ways? If so, explain.
10. Would you say there is a community feeling downtown? Why or why not? If yes, what do you think contributes to that feeling?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that we did not?

Interview Schedule: Coffee Shop/Brewery Customers – Field

Coffee Shop/Brewery Experiences

1. How often do you come downtown for coffee/beer?
2. Can you talk a bit about why you come downtown to (*insert establishment name*) rather than going to chain coffee shops/other bars?
3. Would you say that coffee shops/breweries like this one downtown contribute to the community? If yes, please explain.
4. Describe what supporting locally-owned businesses means to you.
5. Would you describe yourself as someone who is interested in the wellbeing of others, and engages in activities that improve the quality of life of others?
6. Do you feel like you, as an individual, can make a difference by supporting locally-owned establishments? If so, explain.
7. Do you ever try to limit your consumption, and not just as a way to reduce spending? If so, explain.
8. Would you say that you have tried to consciously simplify your life in any other ways? If so, explain.
9. Are there other things you do as a consumer to support the community or for the greater good of others? If so, what are some examples?
10. Would you say there is a community feeling downtown? Why or why not? If yes, what do you think contributes to that feeling?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that we did not?

APPENDIX E

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule: Business Owners – In-depth

History of the Business

1. How long have you been in business?
2. Describe the path you took for opening your business and why you decided to start it.
3. What is the most challenging thing and, what is the most rewarding thing about running an independently-owned business?
4. Please describe your product assortment, for example what do you sell, and why you've chosen to sell these items/brands?

Community and Downtown

5. Why did you choose this location for the business? And, have you been in other locations?
6. What does it mean to own a business in the downtown area?
7. Do you feel there are unique challenges or opportunities to owning a business in the downtown area? If so, please explain.
8. Can you talk about any changes you've seen in the downtown area over the years you have been in business?
9. Do you interact with other business owners in the downtown area? If so, how frequently would you say you do, and in what ways do you interact?

10. Do you participate in any events downtown, if so, which one(s)? (i.e. First Fridays, holiday events such as the Fun Fourth, Easter Egg hunt, Sip and Stroll, etc.)
11. What have your experiences been like when you have participated in such events?
12. Do you feel the community benefits from your presence downtown? In what ways?
13. Are there any associations or groups that business owners downtown belong to, or any sort of group support and marketing tools for businesses like yours? If so, what are they and the purposes and goals of the group?
14. What sorts of challenges do you face by being located in the downtown area?
15. As a business owner, what do you hope to see for the future of downtown?

Communication with Customers or Businesses

16. How do you communicate with your customers? For example, what type of social media do you rely on the most and how do you use it? (i.e. promote merchandise, announce events)
17. Do you communicate with other businesses in the area? If so, how do you do usually do this?
18. How do you think your customers find out about you and who would you say are the majority of your customers (i.e. “regulars,” tourists, etc.)?
19. Can you describe your typical interactions with customers who come in?
20. Describe your typical consumer, if you have one.

Business Owner's Experiences and Perception

21. Why do you think people shop here?
22. What are the personal challenges you face as a business owner in the downtown area?
23. Are there any roles that you see the business fulfilling beyond the obvious one of providing products? If so, please explain.
24. Do you see any differences between the involvement or commitment of locally-owned businesses and national chains? If so, please explain.
25. Do you feel that the business has an influence on the community overall? If so, in what ways?
26. Does your mission include the community? If so, explain.
27. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that we did not?

Interview Schedule: Customers – In-depth

Shopping Experiences

1. How long have you been coming downtown to shop?
2. What made you start shopping downtown?
3. How often do you come downtown to shop? Which places do you shop at when you're downtown?
4. Are there specific items you look for when you come downtown to shop?
5. When you're shopping downtown and looking for something specific, what do you do if you can't find what you want?
6. What did you buy today? Why did you buy it? How much did you spend?

7. How do you feel about shopping at locally-owned stores?
8. Can you talk a bit about why you come downtown to shop rather than in other areas? (i.e. malls, online, etc...)
9. Would you say that choosing stores like this one downtown provides you with any internal reward? If so, explain.
10. What are the best things about shopping downtown? Worst?
11. Would you describe yourself as someone who is interested in the wellbeing of others, and engages in activities that improve the quality of life of others?
12. Do you ever try to limit your consumption, and not just as a way to reduce spending? If so, explain.
13. Would you say that you have tried to consciously simplify your life in any way? If so, explain.
14. Would you say that shopping downtown contributes to the community? If yes, please explain.
15. When you come downtown to shop, do you tend to come alone or with others?
16. What do you think shopping downtown says about you as a person?

Downtown and Community

17. Describe what the downtown area means to you.
18. Describe what shopping locally means to you.
19. Does shopping locally seem like a way to engage with or support the community? If so, explain.

20. Do you feel like you, as an individual, can make a difference with your shopping habits? If so, explain.
21. Are there other things you do to support the community or for the greater good of others through shopping? If so, what are some examples?
22. Do you feel like businesses such as this one contribute to the downtown and help to bring people downtown again?
23. How would you describe your feelings about the businesses downtown? Would you describe yourself as having “relationships” with any of them, if so, can you explain?
24. Have you made any social connections with business owners or employees in downtown businesses?
25. Would you say there is a community feeling downtown? Why or why not? If yes, what do you think contributes to that feeling?
26. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that we did not?

Interview Schedule: Coffee Shop/Brewery Customers – In-depth

Coffee Shop/Brewery Experiences

1. Why do you come downtown for coffee/beer?
2. How long have you been coming here?
3. When you visit places like (*insert establishment name*) do you also visit other stores or establishments in the downtown? If yes, which ones?
4. Can you talk a bit about why you come downtown to (*insert establishment name*) rather than going to chain coffee shops/other bars?

5. What are the best things about the downtown? Worst?
6. Would you describe yourself as someone who is interested in the wellbeing of others, and engages in activities that improve the quality of life of others?
7. Do you ever try to limit your consumption, and not just as a way to reduce spending? If so, explain.
8. Would you say that you have tried to consciously simplify your life in any way? If so, explain.
9. Do you feel like you, as an individual, can make a difference by supporting locally-owned establishments? If so, explain.
10. Would you say that choosing coffee shops/breweries like this one downtown provides you with any internal reward? If so, explain.
11. Are there other things you do as a consumer to support the community or for the greater good of others? If so, what are some examples?
12. Would you say that coffee shops/breweries like this one downtown contribute to the community? If yes, please explain.
13. When you come here, do you tend to come alone or with others?

Downtown and Community

1. Describe what the downtown area means to you.
2. Describe what supporting locally-owned businesses means to you.
3. Does supporting locally-owned businesses like this seem like a way to engage with or support the community?

4. Do you feel like businesses such as this one contribute to the downtown and help to bring people downtown again?
5. How would you describe your feelings about the businesses downtown? Would you describe yourself as having “relationships” with any of them, if so, can you explain?
6. Have you made any social connections with business owners or employees in downtown businesses?
7. Would you say there is a community feeling downtown? Why or why not? If yes, what do you think contributes to that feeling?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that we did not?

Interview Schedule: Chamber of Commerce/Downtown Development

Downtown Revitalization

1. Please describe your role with the organization.
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. How long have you lived in the area?
4. Describe the changes you have seen in the downtown area over the past years.
5. What would you say are the key contributors to the revitalization efforts we have seen downtown? Initiatives? Specific businesses? Other?
6. What role do you think retailers play in revitalization efforts? (i.e. add value to the neighborhood, bring people into the downtown area, enhance the atmosphere, safety, etc... of the area)

7. Do you see any difference in the involvement of locally-owned businesses and national or chain businesses? If yes, please explain.
8. What involvement, if any, do you have with businesses downtown on a regular basis?
9. Do you get feedback from downtown businesses about the overall environment? Events? Etc... If so, what do you hear from them?
10. What further efforts are planned to continue the revitalization efforts downtown?
11. Describe what involvement in the downtown area you see from individuals?
Does it differ from that of organizations or businesses? If so, how?
12. What are some other organizations in the community that are vital to the success of the downtown area? Do you partner with these organizations?
13. Describe the kind of people you see patronizing downtown businesses.
14. What is your perception of the people who shop downtown and support locally-owned businesses based on your experiences with them?
15. What types of businesses would you like to see come into the downtown area?
Why do you think these types of businesses would be important?
16. Would you say there is a community feeling downtown? Why or why not? If yes, what do you think contributes to that feeling?
17. What are your hopes for the future of the downtown area?
18. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that we did not?